progression on many different levels; for years I had been thinking that if a fade is [illegible] gression, and that that exists in and implies [illegible] couldn't one structure a felt awareness of re- [illegible] thru narrative time? During the [illegible] stand and have had the most peculiar experience with that work in relation to N:O:T:H:I:N:G (the colons 'meant' to create somewhat the sense of the real yet paradoxical concreteness of 'nothing' . . . as Wittgenstein so beautifully reveals). As I began to recognize the complex interweaving of levels of 'gradation' (conceptually, sensually, rhythmically, proportionately . . . even the metaphoric level of subject making music, etc.) in the Vermeer I began to see what I was doing in the film in a more conscious way. I allowed the feelings I was getting from this silent dialogue between process of seeing and process of structuring to further clarify the footage I was shooting. I can't get over the intense mental-emotional journeys I got into with this work and hope that the film is powerful enough to allow others to travel along those networks.

Light comes thru the window on the left and not only illuminates the 'Lady at the Virginals' but illuminates the subjects in the two paintings (which are staggered in a forward-reverse simultaneous progression-creating a sense of forward and backward time) hanging on the wall and the one painting on the inside lid of the virginal! The whole composition is circular, folds in on itself but implies that part of that circle exists out in front of the surface. What really moved me was the realization that the light falling across the woman's face compounded the light-gradation-time theme by forcing one back on the awareness of (the paradox of) awareness. I.e., one eye, itself dark, is half covered with light while the other eye is in shadow; both eyes are gazing directly at the viewer as if the woman is projecting music at the viewer thru her gaze (as if reversing the 'normal' role of 'perception') . . . I mean, the whole point is that the instrument by which light-perception is made possible is itself in the dark.")

POSTSCRIPT: Interrelated proportions welded into a formula consisting "of terms, some known and some unknown, some of which were equal to the rest; or rather all of which taken together are equal to noth- [illegible] best form to con-

An Interview with Bruce Baille
by Richard Whitehall
Film Culture 47, summer 1969 p.16-20

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE BAILLIE

by Richard Whitehall

WHITEHALL: Let's start right from the beginning, and the learning process of making films.

BAILLIE: You mean my first handling of any equipment, when I just very slowly and persistently began to learn each different job of putting films together? In the beginning I really, deliberately, tried to emulate a Hollywood type operation. Setting the tripod up, having the subject moving through, trying to hold on to the heads and tails of a scene. All those different basic narrative type movie techniques. And then I had to learn how to handle the tools to edit a film. I used outdated Dupont stock that was given to me. It took a long time. I hated editing. It was so hard. I didn't realize that was the lovely creative center of film-making. I was afraid of editing all the way through the first three films or so. Most of the films I made for a while are short ones, for Canyon Cinema, for a specific local audience.

WHITEHALL: When did you actually start Canyon Cinema?

BAILLIE: I think it was 1961.

WHITEHALL: What turned you to movies in the first place?

BAILLIE: Nothing that I really know. Except I wasn't satisfied with painting, and I had a feeling for my own kind of talent in original theater work. I wanted to pursue that feeling. That brought me into film. I took a course by accident at the University of Minnesota. I became a little bit aware of film medium. Then I went to school in London for a while.

WHITEHALL: O yes, the London School of Film Technique. How long were you there?

BAILLIE: About six months. At Christmas vacation I just went and wandered around Germany. Went down to Yugoslavia. I didn't like being at the school.

WHITEHALL: And when did you come back to San Francisco?

BAILLIE: Got a ship back. Got a job. At Safeway. Took out a loan and bought a camera. Started learning how to use it. Then I was fired. Got unemployment. And I went to work for Marvin Becker in town. Free. For about half a year. Just hanging around and listening to everything. And he's very friendly and knowledgeable about all the tools.

Then I started making *On Sundays* as a learning vehicle. That was my first creative thing in film, where I was expressing something I felt. It was really just a description of my love for the girl in the film. Then I made a story out of the way I saw her. It was very long and I cut pieces out. I have a re-edited workprint on it, and I'd like to fix it up a little technically. But probably wont get around to it, for now I'm just piled up with films that are kind of a year old, along with a whole new raging lovely way of seeing things, and I'm starting to shoot in that now. It's going to be myth. Forms. It's going to be long abstract, maybe, silent, kind of like *Dog Star Man.* In that closet there's a big pile of finished, shot films. A big stack of positive print off the negative for the feature.

WHITEHALL: How much of the feature have you shot?

BAILLIE: All but a little bit of one man who lives in town. He's going to be more or less the same as a narrator in an educational film. Then there's *Morning Star* in there. It's a color and black and white film that will be made with two projectors on a back screen—a small back screen. I'll be mixing up front with my hands, which will be virtually optical printing with malleable matting control. That is, if I don't get too much frame image photographed, because it wont be with sync motors. That'll be about a ten minute film. It's beautiful film, just some of the most beautiful footage I've ever shot. Some of it, just small parts of it. The color. The black and white isn't anything too special, but I'll use that mostly as an environment in which to center the color parts and then matte the two, kind of like I did with *Castro Street.* Only instead of doing it at the shooting stage I'll be doing it at a rephotography stage. There really ought to be control and availability with optical printing to do this type of thing. Scott Bartlett does a lot of this frame by frame. Tom DeWitt. Very good work that they do. Frame by frame just kills me. I have to do it on the run. I have to see what I'm doing. The ideal thing would be an optical printer with at least three projectors operating just like tape recorders. Three projectors playing back into the recording camera, each of which can be controlled in terms of light intensity, total malleable matting on each. And finally you have to monitor all that. And so I figured, well, now they're monitoring the big motion picture cameras with video, I'd do the same with this optical printer. And so then a guy can just sit down and play it like an organ and mix as he will, and not at all be stuck with random superimpositions. On the contrary, be able to have simul taneous but clear parts of the frame available.

WHITEHALL: But the superimposition in *Castro Street* was very carefully planned, surely? How did you manage that?

BAILLIE: Just everything came together when I made that film. I had some kind of intelligence working that allowed me to develop the techniques I needed. But it was three times what the final film was, very hard to edit. Because the footage I had and all of it was good. There wasn't anything bad in it except a few flash frames, and some of those were finally used. I used two projectors when I edited. One was slower than the other so I'd use punch marks when I really got down to where I was working. So I'd stop one when the punch marks got caught up to the next punch marks. But what I'd do was just view it and view it, and write down all the things that worked in terms of my feeling about the film—things I couldn't design or anticipate, as well as all the things I had in mind, the general framework and a lot of diagrams. And yet it took me a long time.

And one reason was, when I first projected it, the two things together, it was a beautiful film just as it was. I projected on the same spot on the screen, not side by side as it would be when I finally had it done. And I couldn't decide for a long time either to cut or why I might begin to edit it.

I liked the assignment in form that I gave myself. To use a street as a basic form rather than a narrative or any kind of storyline. And so I really did start the film out at the beginning of the street, and ended it on the red barn at the end. Then, in terms of discovering an idea, it came right in the middle of a severe period of my life, where I felt I was being born actually. Or

becoming conscious is the way I put it at the time. And the whole film is the shape of being born or becoming conscious. And then the soundtrack was just a miracle thing. When you hear it in stereo it's really a nice piece.

WHITEHALL: And what else have you been working on?

BAILLIE: Apart from *Morning Star* there's a film to my dog, which is all shot. And two other films, short ones, shot in Mexico. One should be very exciting. It was a whole section of material that I thought would be part two of my *Valentin* film. And it didn't work. Most of it was AnscoChrome. About a thousand feet. Mostly of a water area, with a guy carrying water up some stairs. With great golden light. But mixed in are some shots of Paul Tulley's little boy, some windows. Very much random, beautiful, sparkly stuff. I'm just going to go back to it, and forget any idea I had about it before. And, maybe, reshoot it off the screen.

WHITEHALL: Going back to some sort of chronological order, after *On Sundays* you made a number of short news items for Canyon Cinema. The only one I've seen is *Mr. Hayashi.*

BAILLIE: I ran into him, here in the Berkeley area. He became very much a central personality in my life. He was later killed after the film was done.

WHITEHALL: How?

BAILLIE: On the highway, the freeway. It seems to me all heroes seem to get killed on the freeway. Left his shoes behind, and his lunch in a little brown bag. Right there on the highway.

WHITEHALL: He was killed on foot or in an auto accident?

BAILLIE: Always on foot. Paul Tulley used to say that everybody felt kind of safe here at night because they knew Mr. Hayashi was walking around somewhere. He was always on the move. That was a crude film technically. But people seem to like it whether it's crude or not. Sheldon Renan has given a gift print of it to the Museum in New York. What was next?

WHITEHALL: *Friend Fleeing.*

BAILLIE: O yes. There's no print of that. It was one of those things I made to be shown on a specific night at Canyon Cinema. I was going away. So I made a film about going away. I was going to send it back behind me to be shown the next week. I was on my way to L.A. It was raining. I got out of the car. I shot from the car for a while.

WHITEHALL: Then you made *The Gymnasts.* Where did you shoot that?

BAILLIE: The UC (Berkeley) gym.

WHITEHALL: It has an extraordinary feeling to it. Of eeriness.

BAILLE: It was pretty much deliberately a Kafka-like film, even though it was fun. It was my first serious treatment of that feeling of the Kafka individual in that terrifying society. The way it moves. Without explanation to the human part. At first I was going to do it with a Negro girl I knew. I'd worked it all out with her. But she kept not showing up. So finally I shot it with me, partly in the gym, partly in this old abandoned terminal in Oakland. It was my first real exercise in cutting. Mostly editing dance. Mostly editing to create the dance.

WHITEHALL: *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director* seems to be, in atmosphere, pretty much of a companion piece.

BAILLIE: That was pretty much the same theme. A very loose use of the narrative form. It was actually an exercise in feature form, but in a short film. Blocks of narrative material with a story element. Although there were, I think, three major elements that cut across each other. Maybe too much freedom for most viewers. But it was the first film I felt I was getting hold of the tools a little. I had to redo the track a few years later, it was so rotten. Until recently I had to do my sound transferring in the noon hours at Marvin Becker's. For years I didn't know how to do it right. With *On Sundays* I didn't even watch the V-U meter or anything. I was a long time learning all that. And also I never had any gear to work with, any sound readers, a synchronizer, or anything. I started off trying to make orthodox movies. I really tried. I never succeeded. I tried to learn all the basic, all the classical techniques.

WHITEHALL: Then you made *Here I Am,* which is another one I've never seen.

BAILLIE: That was made for a school of mentally disturbed kids. It was pretty good. Very nice soft Plus X interior shooting with artificial light. The whole texture of the film was beautiful. That was a pretty well-made film, technically. I was finally getting to learn how to do things. And then I got into *Parsifal.*

By then I'd used my loans and my money and was up to my ears in debt. Didn't have

any more jobs. Through Audio Film Center I was able to get the little bit of help that made it possible. And I made *Parsifal.* It started out as a very good spring. And I was going to make a tribute to spring and summer. First day, I remember, I was taking a walk with a friend who helped me on *Quixote* a couple of years later. We walked out on the railroad tracks towards Hayward. Big tall green grass. Then, after that, I was with my camera out at sea with Paul Tulley, fishing, and heard Wagner's Parsifal over the short-wave radio. I'd been shooting at sea and not knowing why. But I knew I was building something. Then I began to study what Parsifal was about, and decided to use the opera music. So I studied a lot of Wagner's notes. And then I started studying the hero - figure, and found myself into the whole chain of western heroes. After *Parsifal* I was really broke. So I went into a really big letter-writing thing that would last four or five months. Writing letters for money. Everywhere. About a year later I made *Mass,* after much letter-writing and no money. I don't remember where I got the money to buy the film.

WHITEHALL: How did you get into the particular form and idea of the film?

BAILLIE: *Mass* was partly the result of a long trip I took up into where I come from, South Dakota. Discovering about the Indians and getting into that heroic form—as well as into the Mass itself as a heroic form of western life. By that time I was really into a complicated film.

WHITEHALL: But what about *Quixote,* surely one of the most complex of all American movies?

BAILLIE: *Quixote* is like a long documentary on America, with a lot of themes buried in it. It took most of the year just to get around the country, to shoot it, record it, discover just what it was. In the two books of Don Quixote which were, I think, separated by about ten years it's just . . . it's like a million chapters—some very short, maybe a page, some very long—within which are a number of other subdivisions. Some of which are songs. Or poems. Or literary dissertations. And it had an excellence of form that could be reproduced in other mediums as well as literature.

Quixote was my last western-hero form. It summarized a lot of things. I pretty much emphasized the picture of an American as a conquistador. A conquering man. For example, up in Montana there's a bridge being put up, driving straight through the mountains, and it was half-made when I got up there.

They're chopping their way right through. And, to me, that was the best explanation of what western man was up to.

I'd spent all morning in the Helena library reading about Liver-Eating Baker. An old pioneer Montanan who claimed he would eat the liver right out of an Indian, just murdered. A really bad example of the white pioneer. I was enraged. And when I came to film that bridge I used my camera like a machine-gun. A few frames—3-2-1-5-3-1—and I shot the whole construction of this bridge like that. What I was doing was mailing the film back periodically. And it was stored. I didn't have the money to develop it. Finally I managed to develop it and workprint it. And that part was beautiful. There was no need to edit the whole sequence.

So in *Quixote* I had a number of major parts and, within them, many pieces. All very carefully formed according to my literary incentive out of the two books of Don Quixote. And my own adventure was in two definite parts. Color-filming in the southwest, running off of money and having to come back. And reorganizing, getting ready for the next adventure, looking for the means, finally geting it a month later and setting out, right in the middle of winter.

And as soon as I got out into the mountains one day's trip from here, my car frozen up and everything. My dog and I had to sleep in a sleeping bag together, and it snowed, the windows froze over, the battery was just done in. It was the middle of winter and one day out. I went to a garage and got a push. And got over the Idaho line. Picked up a hitchhiker walking. He casually got in and I said, Gee, what're you doing? I had my full winter gear on, heater on. Got caught out here, he said, and knew I had to keep walking. I gave him some food I had in the car. He says his father had told him, whenever you're out in the winter, keep moving. He said, I almost stopped a few times to rest. The guy had just pulled himself out from dying. He was looking for work. And so we went up into Idaho.

Saw a dead hawk just been killed, got a feather out of his wing. I had it for years after

that. Buried it with a hero-dog that died last year. His back was broken by a car. Like Mr. Hayashi. He died so full of love for living. I buried him with that hawk's feather.

So *Quixote* was put together that way. About a year and a half. It was never quite right. Nobody really liked sitting through it. It wasn't pure film like Brakhage's *Dog Star Man*. Too much superimposition I think. Mainly because I had planned it for two screens. And I could never decide, until right near the end, that it was going to be a one-screen film. In my revisions last summer I took out those random 'two things on one screen' I hate. Now there's hardly any of that left. The Wisconsin State Historical Society bought a copy for their archives. As a historical document. A lot of my major myth figures show up in that film. Like the black horse near the end.

WHITEHALL: And what are the new forms, the new ways of seeing, you feel you're working into?

BAILLIE: Well, what I'm really interested in is a new one. It might be called something like *Feet Fear*. It's a name came to me in a series of dreams, and the film will try to film those dreams I've had. There's a whole mythology of my own grown out of there, and this is probably due to the craziness from hepatitis. This chemical change in the brain operation. It's a little like being high on a small amount of LSD. And I went up into the woods of Oregon and I was terrified. The blackness. And I've had terrifying bestial dreams. They work their way out into a lovelier meeting with Diana, the protectress of men in the woods. I wrote them all down in detail, and I don't know exactly what I'm going to work with, what I'm going to photograph. Using Kodachrome because it's easy to keep it dark and non-grainy around the edges when you're working in a low-level light. It would almost be more effective with animation. It's really the edges of shadows and colors and working in a totally abstract way, and somehow realizing animal shapes out of it—almost the way one would impose an animated figure into a photographed frame. The way Alexieff does it in *Night on Bare Mountain*. In a way it grows out of the things that have been very close to me over the past few months, a form of death. Using the real animals as well as their shapes. Symbols. The word 'symbol' is kind of hard to use. But it really is symbols.

ON "EROS, O BASILEUS," A FILM BY MARKOPOULOS

by Tom Chomont

Eros is king, source of all (pro)creatio renamed in our loveless age as Libido. Lor live the king!

The film occurs in nine scenes or s quences, each a study of a simple action situation. And it is more proper here speak of sequences, for the manner of pr sentation is that of a sequence of shots. Th occurance of flashing or single-frames whi characterizes the editing of *Twice a Ma* and *Himself as Herself* is used more as hig light or emphasis in *Eros, o Basileus*. Mo often the film-maker presents similar or co trasting shots separated by brief fades and from black.

Thus in an extraordinary early scene, Er is seen as a lone figure, bent and sitting a stool before a bare steel bed. He sink down as the shot fades. In the subsequen shot the action begins as he slumps dow but continues to show him begin untying h shoe. In this way the action of bending dow becomes in itself a statement (of dejectio loneliness, resignation.)

Later in the same sequence, he craw from the stool towards the bed... is see lying on the bed... sitting sadly at the fo of the bed with his trousers pulled dow from his thighs... a pan of him lying whi reveals his dark pants, his white shirt, an his bare fore-arm resting on books and a open notebook... a shot of him stretche out on the bed wearing only his black sock etc. Each shot is separated by a brief fa so that the effect is not that of juxtapositio (as a jump-cut), but rather of a stud of the figure on the bed. The meanings ar implied, internal. That is the truth of th pauses which contain the invisible action the images.

The very first image tells us that Eros blind. He does not see: he senses, feel knows. Is the camera Eros' eye? (There is camera, a Bolex to be sure, on the desk the beginning, and much later there are tw reels on rewinds on a dresser.)

The entire film is a searching toward fu fillment, toward self. The fulfillment of Lo (Eros) is Love. But when his hands trav up over the female torso (a dressmaker dummy) towards the head, he does not se that his hand slips past the headless nec towards his own head seen in the mirr

Bruce Baillie

Bruce Baillie was born in South Dakota, and began making films in the San Francisco area in 1960 following a period of drawing, painting, studying and wandering. He was a key figure in the resurgence of independent filmmaking, screening and distribution in the Bay area, founding Canyon Cinema and holding early showings.

It is difficult to generalize about Baillie's filmmaking because he has worked in such a diversity of styles. Several of his early films were made specifically for Canyon Cinema showings, and with their local subject-matter and direct camera style have some elements of the newsreel. Many of the films that followed, while much more complex than these early works, can be seen as deriving from them.

Indeed, Baillie's first film, the relatively long *On Sundays,* contains elements that recur throughout his work. Baillie's own description of it—"combination documentary, and fantasy, partly portraying a lovely friend..."—indicates a mixture that is to recur again and again in different forms. *Mr. Hayashi,* for instance, is partly a very simple portrait of the man with that name. However its brevity, the contemplative lyricism of its photography, and its simple and precise editing give each image a *haiku*-like intensity. One's sense of the man and his surroundings is deepened, while one also feels that the film's experience cannot be simply accounted for by what has appeared on the screen.

Repeatedly throughout his career Baillie's films deal with specific individuals, locations or events, while in his longer films he frequently explores a theme not confined to a single location, as in *Mass* or *Quixote* with their engagement with the wholeAmerican landscape.

In the shorter films, the mixture of the documentary and the poetic recurs in different forms. *Tung* is, like *Mr. Hayashi,* a short portrait, but with less specifics offered about the subject—we learn nothing "concrete" about her. Her black-and-white image, which is the only specific thing we have of her, is combined with lush and haunting color nature imagery to produce a sense of almost vanishing ethereality. Yet the possibility remains that that ethereality, which seems to grow out of her image, may well derive from her presence as a person, and so the portrait may well be as true to her as it is to the filmmaker's sense of the poetic. *A Hurrah For Soldiers* engages itself with a simple theme, the contemplation of a violent news event, but its presentation of a scene of re-enacted violence with newspaper photos is placed in the context of powerfully evocative nature imagery. Throughout his work, Baillie avoids allowing any film to have the simple existence of presenting one subject or theme. Objective and subjective elements are inextricably combined, as if he is asserting that while experience is not "all in the mind," a subjective element is present in any encounter between individual and world.

This combination reaches great complexity in *Mass* and *Quixote,* the two Baillie films with the strongest social content. Both films use mechanized, contemporary America for subject-matter; both combine many different types of images. At certain times—the man on the sidewalk in *Mass*—a clear social statement concerning the death of the individual is apparent. At the same time the complex, almost collage-like forms of both films combine with Baillie's characteristically moody photography to suggest a level of expression which cannot be easily summarized thematically.

One of the films most often used as an introduction to Baillie's work is *Castro Street.* Everything in the film was photographed and recorded on a short stretch of a single street, but the film disrupts the street's original ordering, presenting elements isolated from each other; combined with each other in startling new ways. An encyclopedic variety of images is present: portions of the street appear in both black-and-white and color, in negative and positive, seen through distorting lenses and in focus, and with parts of the frame blacked out so that objects are isolated from their context. This variety makes an almost bewildering variety of combinations possible, as images are intercut and juxtaposed in superimposition. The effects are multiple. A very complete sense of the street's contents is rendered, but without any sense of the street's overall geography. The film's geographic space is an utterly personalized one. At the same time, the variety of image forms suggests that every image is artificial, and results in a film that seems to exist at the limits of its self-destruction, a film whose dark and partially-empty images seem to open out onto a vast emptiness. In fact, Baillie has long been interested in Eastern religions, and his notebooks from the time of *Castro Street* indicate an interest in making a film "about nothing". He never does this; it is rather one of several impulses which are contained in his work, and it is the complex fusion of the documentary, the social, the subjective, the personal, seen through images of extreme delicacy and fragility, that makes his films so profoundly untranslatable. (FC)

Audio Brandon Films 1978-79

On Sundays

26 min. 1960-61 B&W Rental: $18.00

Baillie describes this as his "first film, shot in San Francisco—combination documentary and fantasy, partly portraying a lovely friend, Miss Wong." Baillie's concern is with his character's sensitivity, and the manner in which it interacts with the surrounding city, and thus a major theme of his work emerges with his first film—the ambiguity of the relationship between individual and environment, between individual and experience. In *On Sundays,* a variety of disconnected scenes and incidents occur; they reflect in varying ways on the character's sense of herself.(FC)

Everyman—News No. 3—Mr.Hayashi

11 min. 1961-62 B&W Rental: $12.50

Three short films originally made as "news" items for Baillie's recently founded Canyon Cinema showings; each deals with a then-local subject. *Everyman* is a relatively straightforward record of a demonstration, a kind of film that became increasingly common in the late 60's. *News No. 3* intercuts images of a rally with images of a rock formation; here Baillie is commenting on his material through the intercutting, though rather than being simply thematic the comment places the rally in juxtaposition with a natural environment. *Mr. Hayashi* is a deeply moving short portrait of a man, whose voice is heard speaking on the soundtrack. The photography simultaneously provides a clear view of subject and environs and expresses, through lighting and composition, Baillie's poetic evocation of the subject's spirit.These simply-made films, executed with a minimum of equipment and using readily-available subject-matter, might be especially inspiring to young filmmakers. (FC)

The Gymnasts

8 min. 1962 B&W Rental: $8.00

Also made as a "news" for Canyon Cinema showings, *The Gymnasts* is more of a dramatic film than the earlier three "newses". In the plot, as Baillie describes it, "a young businessman...finds himself among performing gymnasts, whom he joins". Strikingly powerful images which emphasize the vast spaces of the gym help emphasize the way the environment affects the individual, a theme inherent in the plot. (FC)

Have You Thought Of Talking To The Director?

14 min. 1962 B&W Rental: $12.50

This film has elements of the dramatic and poetic, while also being "on one level, a portrait of Paul Tulley". Society's potential for destroying the individual is expressed most strongly in this cutting treatment of a mental patient's state of mind and memories. (FC)

A Hurrah For Soldiers

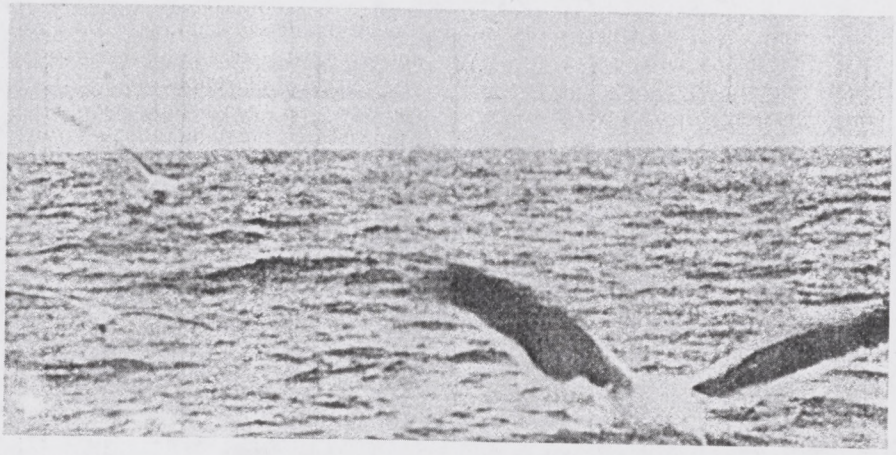
4 min. 1962-63 Color Rental: $7.50

A meditation on a violent murder ("Dedicated to Albert Verbrugghe, whose wife was killed in Katanga by U.N. soldiers..."): news photos are combined with nature imagery. (FC)

To Parsifal

16 min. 1963 Color Rental: $18.00

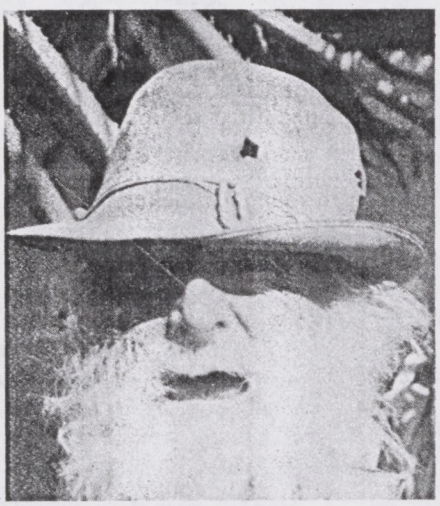
Using Wagner's music as his soundtrack, Baillie used the Parsifal legend to structure this film. His use of nature imagery has never had a more direct and forceful thrust than here: bright colors, strong movements, sharp contrasts in editing. (FC)



Mass

24 min. 1963-64 B&W Rental: $25.00

This film's full title is *Mass For The Dakota Sioux;* the title's dedication, says Baillie, is "to the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass." The film is replete with similarly bitter ironies in image and sound. The destruction of the individual by society is a strong theme expressed through a variety of images. At the same time, Baillie often avoids making his points as simply obvious as they might be, and the visual mood and rhythm of the film conveys a sense of drifting weightlessness whose poetry looks to both earlier and later Baillie films. (FC)



Quixote

45 min. 1964-65 B&W and Color
Rental: $45.00

This is Baillie's most ambitious socially-themed film; he describes it as a vision of "America, el conquistador." Its imagery was taken on a cross-country trip from all phases of American life, and is combined in the film in multiple superimposition, with many images partly blocked out by variable mattes. Baillie's imagery and rhythms are complex and can be taken in several ways; on one level the film's forceful and driving sense of movement seems to express the ways that our society has mastered, conquered and occupied space. (FC)

Brookfield Recreation Center

6 min. 1974 B&W Rental: $10.00

Baillie identifies this as "a film made for Oakland Public Schools...on an experimental series of classes in the arts..."His interest is in the intense, individualized rhythms of the children's play. (FC)

Yellow Horse

9 min. 1966 Color Rental: $10.00

In 1966, Baillie began to make films with less directly social themes than in his earlier work. This "cycle scrambles poem" is impressionistically photographed and edited with rhythms which are surprisingly gentle considering the subject-matter. (FC)

Tung

5 min. 1966 B&W and Color
Silent (24 FPS) Rental: $10.00

Baillie calls this a "portrait of a friend named Tung, deriving directly from a momentary image on waking." This indicates that the film's source is not in daily eyesight but in those curiously fleeting images which appear at the boundaries between sleep and wakefulness, and the fragile, elusive quality of the film's imagery confirms this. A woman's head in Black and White negative is superimposed on fragmentary nature imagery; the result is haunting, other-worldly, as if the images we see do not inhabit the space of our daily lives. The film's silence (this is Baillie's only silent film) is absolute, and adds to the image's "otherness". (FC)

Castro Street

min. 1966 Color and B&W Rental: $12.50

"film in the form of a street" is one llie's most widely-screened ks. By fragmenting its objects and presenting them outside of the street's overall geography Baillie gives what is in some ways a more complete picture of the street than conventional photographic methods would. Collage-like juxtapositions of many types of images is accompanied by a similarly complex soundtrack. (FC)

All My Life

3 min. 1966 Color Rental: $7.50

A single-take pan along a fence accompanied by Ella Fitzgerald singing "All My Life" on the soundtrack; Baillie's description: "Singing fence." One of his simplest, yet mysteriously effective, films. (FC)

Still Life

2 min. 1966 Color Rental: $7.50

Like *All My Life,* a one-take film, though Baillie asks that these two films *not* be shown together on the same program. A static, tripod shot; commune members drift in and out of frame and are heard on the soundtrack. (FC)

Port Chicago Vigil

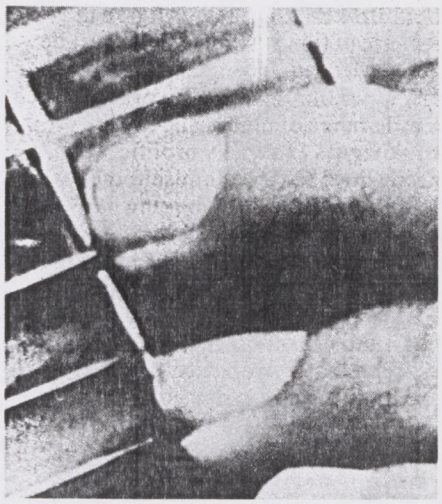
10 min. 1966 B&W Rental: $12.50

A film of a vigil outside a U.S. Marine Depot. Baillie clearly records various aspects of the demonstration, avoiding the "abstracting" techniques of *Tung* or *Castro Street.* At the same time, the editing avoids enforcing obvious connections between events and the film's temporality has a floating, suspended quality reminiscent of many earlier Baillie films. (FC)

Valentin De Las Sierras

10 min. 1968 Color Rental; $12.50

One of Baillie's very greatest works. The location: a Mexican village. Baillie's description: "Skin, eyes, knees, horses, hair, sun earth." The camera concentrates on individual details, but there are none of the abstracting techniques of *Castro Street.* The images are hard and clear, the cuts sharp and abrupt in both image and sound. More strongly than any other Baillie film, this work puts the viewer in a state which is very difficult to explain or account for in terms of the specifics of the film. (FC)



Quick Billy

56 min. 1967-70 Color and B&W Rental: $60.00

Note: The film is on four separate reels, and the film-maker asks that it be shown on one projector; the pauses between reels are an intended part of the showing.

This is Baillie's most complex, and probably his greatest, film. Each part is quite different from every other, and the four together form a kind of progression. Baillie identifies the *Bardo Thodol* (Tibetan Book of the Dead) as having served to help structure the first three parts, and he refers also to Dante.

The first part carries elements of *Tung* and *Castro Street* to a very pure extreme. Images of nature, the sun and moon, of light, lead into one another with a smooth, but often disturbing, flow. One can readily see the connection to notions of life after death: even more than in *Tung,* these are not images presented in a manner that relates to ordinary, daily seeing. As the film progresses through its parts, a movement toward what seems to be a greater exteriority, a less subjective vision, seems apparent; the last part is a staged western-parody, photographed relatively conventionally. On closer examination, however, the film's progression becomes more ambiguous, and the final section can be seen as being more "artificial" (it *is* staged) than the first. The film's various sections and various styles can be seen as extensions of the different modes of filmmaking of Baillie's earlier films; they also relate to the varieties of states of consciousness which we experience in our own lives. (FC)

Metanomen

8 min. 1966 B&W Rental: $15.00
Directed by Scott Bartlett.

Metanomen is Scott Bartlett's first film, and has won many awards. Subject-matter (two characters and a railroad yard) is abstracted and re-combined with a number of techniques, organized into rhythmic patterns. The result is a film which is a study in shape, form, movement, in high-contrast black-and-white, rather than a film which uses those elements to represent some external feeling or idea. (FC)

The T Cross and A Thimble Of Goodbye

9 min. B&W Rental: $11.00
Directed by Paul Beattie.

Paul Beattie's *The T Cross* is described by Beattie as a "complete film drama," and though it is only one minute long it does have some key aspects of drama—anticipation, suspense, and revelation/relief. *A Thimble Of Goodbye,* which is longer, involves the actions of several people in a run-down area. There is a gentleness of rhythm, and a careful inter-weaving of the destinies of people and their surroundings, that recalls some aspects of Bruce Baillie's work. (FC)

From Autobiography: Film/Video/Photography
(listed in subject catalogue)

Bruce Baillie

Quick Billy (1970, 61 minutes, color/b&w)

Born 1931, Aberdeen, South Dakota
Lives in Berkeley, California and Oregon

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

30] *To Parsifal* (1963); *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964); *Quixote* (1965: revisions — 1967); *Castro Street* (1966); *All My Life* (1966); *Valentin de las Sierras* (1967); *Quick Billy* (1967-71); *Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)* (1977)

In *Quixote* Baillie had brought his lyrical cinema to the threshold of epic and mythopoeia. Although it seemed at that time that, like most of the major avant-gardists, he would plunge into an extended mythopoeic work, he resisted that drive, making instead his late lyrical and structural films, *Tung*, *Castro Street*, *All My Life*, *Still Life*, and *Valentin de las Sierras*. In 1967 he began an almost fatal bout with hepatitis which he recorded in his most ambitious film *Quick Billy* (1971), a four-part hour-long essay in mythopoeia and autobiography. He presented the following note with the film at its New York première at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

> The essential experience of transformation, between Life and Death, death and birth, or rebirth. In four reels, the first three adapted from the *Bardo Thodol, The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The fourth reel is the form of a black and white one-reeler Western, summarizing the material of the first three reels, which are color and abstract.
> The work incorporates a large body of material dreams, the daily recording roll by roll of that extraordinary period of the filmmakers' life, "the moment by moment confrontation with Reality" (Carl Jung, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*). Each phase of the work was given its own time to develop, stretching over a period of 3½ years.
> "The rolls," silent 3 minute rolls of films that came after the film itself, like artifacts from the descending layers of an archeological dig ... numbered 41, 43, 46 and 47. Aesthetically complete, thus included (rent free option) as part of the total work. Reel 4 conceived by Paul Tulley, Charlotte Todd, and myself, with Debby Porter, Bob Treadwell and Kiro Tulley. Music by John Adams, titles by Bob Ross.
> The "rolls" took the form of a correspondence, or theatre, between their author and Stan Brakhage, in the winter of 1968-69.[1]

Baillie's deepest debt to Brakhage, however, is not the encouraging letters he wrote in response to the four epilogue reels, which he saw out of the context; it is rather to the opening of *Prelude: Dog Star Man* and to the whole of *Part Three* of that film. The whole first three reels of *Quick Billy* hover on the edge of consciousness, mixing, blurring, and masking images so that they are rarely definable, even though within its own range of textures the film proceeds from the abstract to the relatively concrete and specific before leaping into the ironic narrative of the fourth reel. *Dog Star Man* had elaborated the possibilities of different densities of super-imposition. Baillie's contribution to this rhetoric, which is particularly effective in the three areas of his concentration, the evocation of natal, thanatotic, and erotic consciousness, comes from his application of the process of *Castro Street* to the material of *Quick Billy*. He mixed his own superimpositions with complex masking, while Brakhage had worked in simple additive units (two to four layers). Furthermore, Baillie reinforces his visual mesh with an equally subtle fusion of natural noises, voice, and artificially altered sounds on the soundtrack.

Baillie has written, "All of the film was recorded next to the Pacific Ocean in Fort Bragg, California, from dreams and daily life there; all of it given its own good *time* to evolve and become clear to me. The Sea is the main force through the film. 'Prentice to the Sea!' was something I wrote to myself in those days."

* * *

All through the film are woven images of the sea, trees, animals — including the fearful symmetry of a dream-like tiger — fire, the sun, and the moon. The superimposition with the textural masking blends these images together and often keeps them at the threshold of recognition, as I have said; it also creates mutations of form and color which give an aspect of the monstrous to the imagery. Baillie originally planned to call the film *Feetfear*. He told Richard Whitehall:

> It's a name came to me in a series of dreams, and the film will try to film those dreams I've had. There's a whole mythology of my own grown out of there, and this is probably due to the craziness from hepatitis. This chemical change in the brain operation. It's a little like being high on a small amount of LSD. And I went up into the woods of Oregon and I was terrified. The blackness. And I've had terrifying bestial dreams. They work their way out into a lovelier meeting with Diana, the protectress of men in the woods. I wrote them all down in detail, and I don't know exactly what I'm going to work with, what I'm going to photograph. Using Kodachrome because it's easy to keep it dark and non-grainy around the edges when you're working in a low-level light. It would almost be more ef-

fective in animation. It's really the edges of shadows and colors and working in a totally abstract way, and somehow realizing animal shapes out of it — almost the way one would impose an animated figure into a photographed frame. The way Alexieff does it in *Night on Bare Mountain*. In a way it grows out of the things that have been very close to me over the past few months, a form of death. Using the real animals as well as their shapes. Symbols. The word "symbol" is kind of hard to use. But it really is symbols.[2]

In the same synopsis that I quoted, he tried to define the title *Feetfear* by placing next to it the expressions, "Fear of leaving the beast/loss of innocence — 'confronted by Reality.'" At that time he reserved the title *Quick Billy* for the ironic fourth reel.

That parody, "set in Kansas in 1863," describes in ribald gags the arrival of an uncouth cowboy, played by the filmmaker, who takes over a Kansas farmhouse. His drunkenness and his rape of the farm girl parody the states of marginal consciousness and the powerful erotic episode in the earlier part, where Baillie, working with close and colored images of the male and female body in a direct descent from *Part Three: Dog Star Man*, succeeded in evoking the erotic experience as Brakhage never quite did, either in *Dog Star Man*, the lyrical films, or in his two explicitly erotic series, *Lovemaking* and *Sexual Meditations*.

Baillie offers a cinematic and a literary analogy to the "rolls" in the notebooks; they are "like chambers (episodes: e.g., Cocteau's hotel, or Steppenwolf's magic theater)." They not only represent an early temporal stratum in the composition of the film, they also locate in magical visions, according to the analogies, the origins of the film, fix the place where it was shot, show a prop for the fourth reel in its presence outside of the narrative, define the space of a breakfast scene that the filmmaker had earlier described on the soundtrack. Thus, in one of the rolls the startling face of the dying filmmaker, which Brakhage accurately described to him as staring into the camera as if into a mirror, identifies the maker, whom we see otherwise in extreme body close-ups or in the cowboy *persona*. In another, a giant Uncle Sam prop which had been used in the black-and-white fourth reel moves along the seascape, which appears for the first time without distortion, uniting the two earlier sections of the film. Finally, the slow pan around the kitchen shows the cabin where most of the film was made and recalls in the silent images of an empty room the breakfast, described in the longest passage of talk in the first three reels, of "hot pancakes and eggs and fresh bread and tea and honey" as they "sat in front of the window and watched the sea, where I shot all the film."

P. Adams Sitney, Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde *(New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 260, 261, 263, 264, 265.*

[1]Program notes of the Whitney Museum of American Art, "New Americana Filmmakers Series," March 25-31, 1971.

[2]Richard Whitehall, "An Interview with Bruce Baillie," *Film Culture*, No. 47 (Spring 1969), 20.

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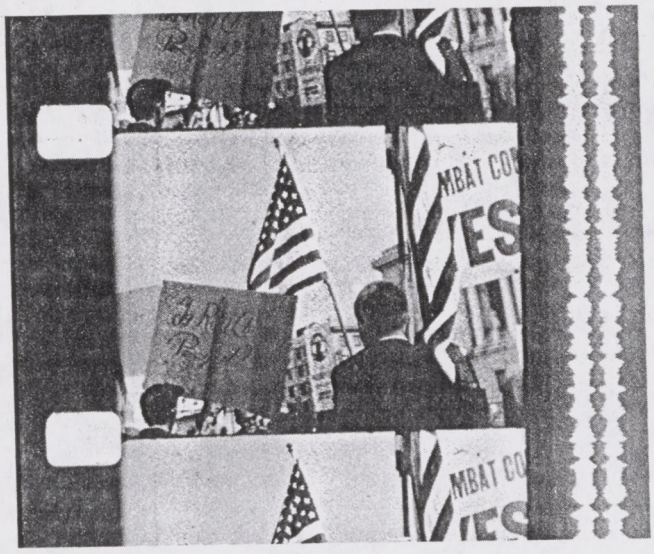


NEWS NO. 3

Audio Brandon Films Vol 1 1976-77

STEVEN ARNOLD and MICHAEL WIESE

MESSAGES, MESSAGES

30 min. 1969

MESSAGES, MESSAGES is an exciting exploration of a young man's subconscious, and is conceived as a journey through a world of complex, surrealistic imagery. Its creators, Steven Arnold and Michael Wiese have said: "Messages, Messages—A vast tapestry exploring the phenomenon of psychic life enters the mirrored corridors of a world resplendent with winged cloud creatures—insect women—underwater cities—gardens of lunar labyrinths—grottos of transparent levitating bodies—Messages, Messages is an offering."

To present this dream-like world, the directors have used stark, chiaroscuro black-and-white; flickering shadows across faces; bodies which seem to float; hideous and frightening images of people; and fantastic costumes, makeup, and settings. But despite this, and the directors' own statement, the film is ultimately not concerned with its elaborate trappings. It is a serious study of the mind, and its images transcend their immediate sensual significance into a universal meaning.

BRUCE BAILLIE

"My own method so far has been to enter — thoughtlessly — into the environment of a new film, discover the film while it is taking shape."

Baillie's films begin with images that are concrete and contemporary. Many of his films — portraits of people, places, incidents — have a strong documentary flavor. We seem to be seeing 'slices of life' that reveal keen insights not only into the individual subjects being depicted, but the larger societies, movements, patterns of which they're a part.

Beneath all the films, however, there lies a strong element of romanticism. The world Baillie presents is a constantly changing one, fluid and elusive as "her bright shadow" in **Tung** and the motorcyclist in **Mass.** This flux is at the source of Baillie's lyricism; it is that which no careful, objective portrayal can pin down. The geometric patterns of Baillie's compositions relate to a reality that can be intellectually understood and morally judged. The spontaneity of his single takes and moving shots suggest longings which no state of reality can ever fulfill. The tensions stemming from this duality, between formalism and improvisation, are posed thematically by the conflict between the individual and society in several of Baillie's films. And even in a 3 minute, one-shot film as simple as **All My Life,** Baillie transforms a simple early summer scene into one that is full of implied associations, remembered emotions and occurrences.

ON SUNDAYS

26 min. 1960-61

Baillie's first film depicts a young woman's encounter with an old alcoholic in an abandoned house just outside San Francisco. The easy freedom to the girl's manner and life is contrasted with the grim, trapped world of the skid row alcoholics. Remarkably advanced for a first film, themes and visual patterns that were to become a vital part of Baillie's vocabulary are given poignant expression through Baillie's treatment of this unusual relationship. The film opens on a montage gradually pulling away from rigidly symmetrical shots of San Francisco industry to open shots of two dogs and the film's heroine playing out in the countryside — a notable pattern of **Castro Street, To Parsifal** and other Baillies. The film ends on a sequence of the young woman dancing, the central image of **Tung.**

EVERYMAN — NEWS NO. 3 — MR. HAYASHI

11 min. 1961 - 1962

EVERYMAN records a protest demonstration outside the courthouse in which men are being tried for sailing a boat called "Everyman" too close to the Pacific nuclear testing area. NEWS NO. 3 intercuts similar shots of a Cuban rally and the rock formations by which the rally is taking place. MR. HAYASHI is a portrait of "a real, living saint," a poor gardener whose anguished life has never altered his love of nature and his work.

THE GYMNASTS

8 min. 1962

A fantasy of liberation. "Basically a dramatic form, concerning young business man (played by film-maker) who in the course of some everyday transaction finds himself among performing gymnasts, whom he joins. In the end of the film he is seen once again 'at the same moment' before he entered the gymnasium."

HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF TALKING TO THE DIRECTOR?

14 min. 1962

A claustrophobic view of the individual within society, parallelled to the mental patient within a hospital. Improvisatory scenes of a group of people playing music, dancing, having a good time, are contrasted with a man's haunting memories. "Made on the north coast of California in Mendocino . . . combining spontaneity and preconception in a film that is essentially a short lesson in feature form. On one level, a portrait of Paul Tulley."

A HURRAH FOR SOLDIERS

4 min. Color 1962 - 63

"Dedicated to Albert Verbrugghe, whose wife was killed in Katanga by U.N. soldiers. Presentiment of the meeting of historic forces . . ." Lyric images of the ocean at sunset are intercut with scenes of birds flying over the water, stained glass windows, a priest, a man being symbolically slain, photographs of injured men. One of Baillie's simplest and most moving films, it is a striking, reverential ode to life, as well as a somber representation of mourning.

TO PARSIFAL

16 min. Color 1963

Grand Prize, Ann Arbor Film Festival, 1963. Golden Gate Award, San Francisco International Film Festival, 1963. The ocean and mountains, a boat and railroad train are the central subjects of Baillie's film, using the European legend as basic structure and hero, and Richard Wagner's music for the soundtrack. The film is a depiction of "he who becomes slowly wise," the most direct and lyrical film of nature of Baillie's early period.

MASS

24 min. 1963 - 64

Grand Prize, Ann Arbor Film Festival, 1964. "No chance for me to live, Mother, you might as well mourn." Baillie uses the structure of the Mass, traditionally a celebration of life, as the form for his portrayal of a society, our own, feeding on the death of another society, that of the American Indian. A Funereal tone pervades the film, one that stresses irony and contrast — the applause preceding the shot of the dead man on the pavement, the Rolls Royce behind the hero's motorcycle on the highway, etc.

QUIXOTE

45 min. Color & B/W 1964 - 65

Baillie's epic portrait of America, shot during his six month odyssey across the states. Scenes of the nation's industry, workers, teenagers at a basketball game, poverty stricken Indians on a reservation, TV superheroes, desert and mountain landscapes are interspersed in a film journey that juxtaposes the aspirations and reality of America. "Climaxing the film-maker's first period of work, QUIXOTE is a kind of summary and conclusion of a number of themes, etc., especially that of the **hero** . . . depicting Western orientation as essentially one of conquest."

YELLOW HORSE

8 min. Color 1965

A solo string bass accompanies scenes of a motorcycle race. Much of it shot in slow motion and soft focus, Baillie stresses the grace and rhythmic beauty of the scene over the more familiar impressions of tension and speed — a beauty not unlike that of the muscular coordination of steeds.

TUNG

5 min. Color, Silent 1966

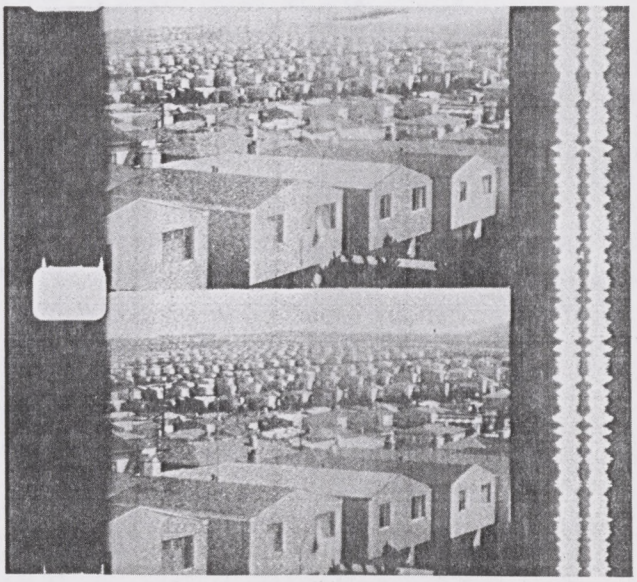
Shots of a girl dancing in black and white negative are intercut, superimposed over shots moving along plants, some out of focus, in Baillie's most intensely lyrical film. The film ends on a note of memory and romance, applicable to many of his other films: "Seeing her bright shadow I thought she was someone I/ you/ we had known." The film is a "portrait of a friend named Tung, deriving directly from a momentary image of waking."

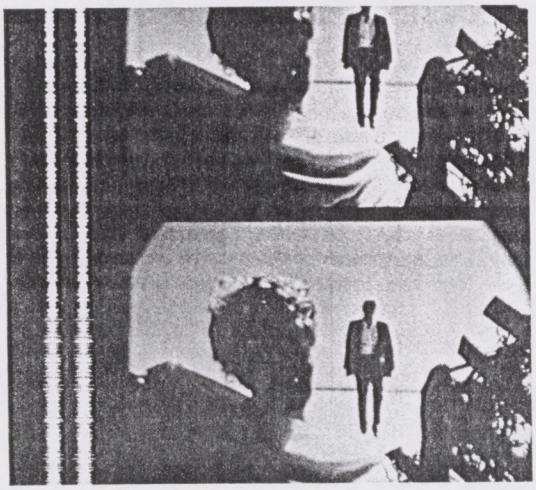
CASTRO STREET

10 min. Color 1966

Perhaps Baillie's best known film, the work is a tour-de-force in its use of color and camera movement in expressing a set of complicated, often paradoxical feelings for a locale. "Inspired by a lesson from Eric Satie; a film in the form of a street — Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California . . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks and buildings on the other — the street and film, ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street is black-and-white (secondary), and one is color like male and female elements. The emergence of a long switch engineer shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential image of **consciousness.**"

CASTRO STREET





2

ALL MY LIFE

3 min. Color 1966

"All My Life," a wistful song by Ella Fitzgerald is played over a single shot, panning slowly along a fence surrounded by the bright flowers of early summer, and ending on the deep blue sky above it. The simplicity of the composition and camera movement, the richness of colors combine in creating a captivating aura of romance and nostalgia.

STILL LIFE

2 min. Color 1966

The camera holds on a single shot of one dimly lit room, photographed from another, as a group of friends sit, talk, walk back and forth. The classical precision of the framing contrasts with the freewheeling spontaneity of the dialogue and action. "Summer, 1966; coming out of the artist's period of life at Graton — a communal venture in the woods north of San Francisco. A film on efforts toward new American religion."

PORT CHICAGO

10 min. 1966

Demonstrators hold a peace vigil outside a U.S. Naval weapons station. The soundtrack intercuts a Lyndon Johnson press conference with on-the-scene dialogue of the demonstrators. "You see, to me, one of the first things is understanding another man's pain," one of the demonstrators says; and this seems a vital aspect of what Baillie sets out to accomplish in his poetic document.

VALENTIN

10 min. Color 1968

Technically one of Baillie's simplest films, VALENTIN may well be Baillie's most beautiful and impassioned film. The film chronicles a day in the life of a poor Mexican family, beginning on the dim light of daybreak, as the mother sweeps up the floor, ending on children playing ball by the soft twilight. The central motif is a blind man accompanying himself on guitar as he sings the song "Valentin." The sense of peace and natural harmony at the core of **Mr. Hayashi** are the most striking features of this tribute to self-expression.

BROOKFIELD RECREATION CENTER

8 min.

"Children exploring the rhythms of the universe through art." A percussive soundtrack backs up scenes of elementary school children dancing, beating out rhythms on drums and tables, shaping clay figures, running in a playground — expressing internal feelings through physical activity. Opening and closing on the same simple shots, the center of the film is filled with physical energy. The film's cyclical nature is that of a song, its careful structuring of uncontrolled, spontaneous joy and activity that of a Gloria.

SCOTT BARTLETT

METANOMEN

8 min. 1966

This first film, produced while Bartlett was a student at San Francisco State College, has won many awards, including the First Prize, Experimental Category, National Student Film Awards. It is a study of a couple, set against a railroad yard, photographed in stark black-and-white, and accompanied by a haunting score. Techniques employed include negative images, extreme high contrast, superimposition, and divided frame. Film-maker Lenny Lipton has said of METANOMEN: "The film is so interesting because it harnesses a kind of rhythmic conflict. The film is tense, and out of this tenseness arises the vision of an enigmatic girl, set in opposition to a man shown as a contrasty profile. The two characters are set in a flux of manipulated technology run wild, and in this sense, the film reminded me of RED DESERT. . . . The rushing shapes, and multiple forms, and combinations of forms, beat against each other and at the couple, who seem to be rushing toward each other, across a harsh, contrasty, black-and-white landscape."

ROBERT BEAN

2

9 min. Color 1967

This is a devastatingly funny parody that takes a delicious slap at art films, particularly those of Antonioni and Fellini. A young man and young woman meet on an ocean beach, he rather suave in appearance and she outlandishly attired in a flowing gown. After some initial horseplay, they engage in conversation — in Italian with English subtitles — but what conversation and what subtitles! They are guaranteed to keep any foreign film audience howling. TV comedienne Renee Taylor wrote this clever film, and plays the part of the woman. The musical and vocal accompaniment is adapted from a Yardley Men's Toiletries TV commercial. It's an absolute must, and our guess is that you'll find more than one occasion to show it.

SOUTHWESTERN ALTERNATE MEDIA PROJECT, EL PASO

INDEPENDENT CINEMA

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Program Notes for QUICK BILLY by Bruce Baillie, Feb. 28, 1979

Of Quick Billy, Bruce Baillie has written, "All of the film was recorded next to the Pacific Ocean in Fort Bragg, California, from dreams and daily life there; all of it given its own good time to evolve and become clear to me. The Sea is the main force through the film. 'Prentice to the Sea!' was something I wrote to myself in those days."

It is perhaps impossible to write anything ultimately meaningful about a major American avant garde masterpiece such as Quick Billy after only one viewing; in a sense, then, the process of writing down the initial memory impulses is in itself a metaphor for the actual viewing of the film. In this case, the old saying of "One picture is worth a thousand words" is indeed true, yet the need to verbalize on paper the epheremalities of light is part of the active film-viewing process.

In Quick Billy, we see the filmmaker recovering from an almost fatal bout with hepatitis which he very faithfully records in his most ambitious film up to that time. We, the viewers, become privileged witnesses to the daily drama of a single human being involved in a valiant struggle with a serious physical illness; we also witness the filmmaker attempting to walk that great tight rope of life known as time, to perhaps bring back the light so that we may bask in it. Just as this imaginary time line also poses certain questions of duration and movement (or anima), so too, does film pose its own questions. Film, then, is also light, color, form, content, illusion (of movement), and perhaps above all, memory. In Quick Billy, we see Baillie not only recording the light of his dreams and his daily life, but also creating history (& his story) by bringing back the traces of the light journey he took. Thus we see that Baillie has not only recorded his soul's odyssey but has also created history (as the dictionary defines history as a record of significant events) because his film, as all film, is built on time and light, in fact is time and light, and is actually memory made visible. Baillie has made his psychic journey an actual entity to be experienced.

For us, the viewers, Baillie's film is a memory that is wound on a reel that is periodically struck by light in order to jar "memory" (of both filmmaker and audience) into movement. Quick Billy then poses a very difficult question in respect to memory recall. I know I've seen a great work when the images are vividly re-called; conversely, a particularly complex, arresting work can simply overpower me by its great integrity of the "moment," to the extent that I can't re-member anything. When this happens, I also know I've seen (?) a great work. Baillie's Quick Billy and Brakhage's Dog Star Man were for me two such films.

Yet it is not really fair to say that Baillie's film cannot be recalled in the chambers of the mind, because it can. Quick Billy does divide up into three or four distinct sections, or concerns. The totemic concerns are quite evident throughout the film, as are his tracings of the natural world through light ingathered by the camera lens, and his great fear/awe/ fascination of & by the female-tiger and protectress. The erotic reality of the daily life by the ocean is powerfully evoked in a series of metaphors that bring out Baillie's terror AND feelings of security as he unites with the totemic female. We see in the film recurrent images of Woman being compared to a tiger, a lion, to the constant gaze of a bird's eye, and finally to the actions of light upon the fur of a cat giving birth. We also see very explicit renderings of the erotic life as experienced by the filmmaker, yet we are always aware that it is not done in a gratuitous or shocking manner, but rather as a ground to counter the overwhelming dream-like quality of the rest of the film.

In the first section, we are introduced to a new experience of a film time as we stare at a long hold on a field of yellow light. After a long hold on this field of imageless yellow light, Baillie begins the process of tracing the outlines of the natural world through the light he catches in his lens. Baillie is "catching" his dreams in his camera-basket and is bringing them back to us so that we may see just how the world is formed by light. Yet great mystery is felt because we have not seen this world before. To meditate upon form alone is difficult because to us the world is so tangible. But Baillie convinces us that light IS the real stuff of which the world is made, and that perhaps we really are dreaming, and have been dreaming all along.

In the second and third sections, the mystery is extended to not only a meditation on the dream states brought on by the fevers

of hepatitis, but also to the filmmaker's attempts to grasp onto a reality that can be touched and thus perhaps truly felt. We see the meditation become more centered upon the daily tasks of life, in particular the erotic and the mundane. The erotic life provides the artist with an anchor to affirm his own existence, and the mundane aspects of life (a visit by the filmmaker's parents, visits with neighbors, riding horses, looking at old scrapbook photos of his high school classmates etc.), all serve to remind us that the filmmaker is on the road to recovery. By the time the fourth reel rolls around, we are convinced that the filmmaker is his old self by the uproariously vulgar role he assumes in this one-reel horse opera. Thus the maker has completed his journey from The Dreamer to The Cowboy as we see him ride into the future with the title "Ever Westward Eternal Rider" ending the film.

-Willie Varela

NEXT SHOW: Wednesday, March 14

Bruce Conner's THE WHITE ROSE (Jay de Feo's painting in motion).
REPORT (The tragic absurdity on the day of John Kennedy's assassination).
LOOKING FOR MUSHROOMS (Magic mushrooms in Mexico).
BREAKAWAY (A dance).

Lenny Lipton's SHOW AND TELL (Really funny things leave something deadly serious and beautiful that echo like after-images in your mind).

THE P-38 PILOT

Bruce Baillie. 4/90. 15-minutes. From S-VHS master.

"For the dispossessed, the excluded, the condemned ...
exiled by our own preferences."

A work from the darkness of winter, a kind of pre- Paradiso which parallels by chance, Dante's Purgatorio - my own confessions and clues to ascent, life and Light.

Abstract imagery from my home, winter rain, WW II paraphenalia, etc., along with an audio monologue recorded years ago and carried back and forth across the country, living out of my VW.
Made with simple home equipment no budget, 6 - 7 month's time and toil.

As all art is made from some particular sort of sticks and stones, this piece happens to be formed from the words of a war hero who suffers his own peculiar "habitante", as this P-38 pilot would have it. The (film) is not, however, a documentary about - in this case - alcoholism.

Note from the conclusion: "Te lucis ante terminum" (Thy Light before the end - or, before the darkness), taken from the traditional Compline service at the end of the day, sung by Christian religious through the centuries. The image of beloved (my family) at the very end of the work is the final, perhaps essential clue, given also of course by Dante Alighieri in his 14th Century classic, by way of Beatrice: i.e., th way beyond inevitable suffering, transcending individual intellect, is only through (pure) love and loving.

- B.B.,
Camano Island, WA

Kathleen Connor: "A cohesive Baillie song of sound and sight, a flowing visual essay. Bruce has made the transition from the film to the video format without compromising the beauty of the image .... [it] begins with a canvas of blended, delicate color. Soft violet and pale yellow are separated by a whitish area, and water drips, very fresh, down the silvery texture of a window screen."

Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?) (1974); 16mm, color, sound, 17 minutes

"My *Romance* is intended for something like 'broadcast' form, or like a correspondence... not so much for showing a big batch of it at one sitting. Eventually, it should be in both film and video tape form. The Introduction, *Intro. 1 & 2,* is finished now. I will send rolls from time to time and hope one of these days to put the rest of it in shape for you to see. Meanwhile, I'll be continuing to record the *Romance* wherever I am. The work seems to be a sort of manual, concerning all the stuff of the cycle of life, from the most detailed mundanery to... God knows."

— Bruce Baillie

encl.
Irina.

MASS FOR THE DAKOTA SIOUX
BRUCE BAILLIE

1963-64, 24 minutes, black & white.

An ironic and pessimistic view of America - its politics, its technology, its waste and violence - and of the "heroic" outsider.

California - based filmmaker and founder of the Canyon Cinema Cooperative in Berkeley, Bruce Baillie is one of the true cinema poets. His short films can be likened to cinematic haikus or imagist poems. His early longer works blend poetic elements with despairing reflections on politics and ecological disaster. All of his works show careful composition of soundtrack and image. Running throughout his films is the lone traveller, a figure with whom Baillie identifies, a representative of the "free" and "heroic" man, but one who is also, as Paul Arthur points out is Essay 3, "incapable of sustaining meaningful contact with either the victims of a culture he condemns or with his nostalgic intimation of a pastoral existence."

For Mass for the Dakota Sioux, Baillie shot staged and documentary footage in and around San Francisco and off television and movie screens. He also used fog filters, overexposure and other techniques to "keep things very diffuse." The title of the film refers to its ritual structure described below.

> The film begins with a short introduction - "No chance for me to live, Mother, you might as well mourn." Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux chief. Applause for a lone figure dying on the street. Introit. A long, lightly - exposed section composed in the camera. Kyrie. A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bridge accompanied by the sound of Gregorian chant, recorded at the Trappist Monastery in Vina, California. The Epistle is in several sections. In this central part the film becomes gradually more outrageous, the material being either from television or the movies photographed directly from the screen. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout. Gloria. The sound of a siren and a short sequence of a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel. The final section of the Communion begins with the Offertory in a procession of lights and figures to the second chant. The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isolated people, accompanied by the final chant. The Mass is traditionally a celebration of Life; thus the contradiction between the form of the Mass and the theme of Death. The dedication is to the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass.
>
> Bruce Baillie

CASTRO STREET
BRUCE BAILLIE

1966, 10 minutes, color.

A multi-layered portrait of a street - switch engines, refinery tanks, smoke stacks, pastoral areas, etc.

Castro Street is a tour-de-force of filmic technique combined with poetry. The film uses mixing of positive and negative, black-and-white with color footage, frame masking, distorting lenses and an intentionally wrongly-threaded camera to blur images and multiple superimposition among other techniques to revitalize the audience's perceptions of an industrial landscape.

> Inspired by a lesson from Eric Satie, a film in the form of a street - Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, Ca. . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks and buildings on the other - the street and film ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street, one side is black-and-white (secondary) and one side is color - like male and female elements. The emergence of a long switch-engine shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential of consciousness.
>
> Bruce Baillie

U of Minn. Film Society April 17, 1964

TODAY'S PROGRAM:

1. The films of BRUCE BAILLIE

HURRAH FOR SOLDIERS	5 min.	1963
BROOKFIELD REC. CENTER	6 min.	1963
TO PARSIFAL	16 min.	1963

2. THE BURMESE HARP; directed by Ken Ichikawa (Japan, 1956) 116 min.

NEXT FRIDAY: LOLA, directed by Jacques Demy (French, 1962) subtitles. Starring Anouk Aimee, this neglected work by one of the newer young French film-makers, about a cabaret singer in Nantes.

BRUCE BAILLIE AND HIS FILMS

Baillie is a 33-year-old West Coast film-maker, whose TO PARSIFAL won the Golden Gate Award as the best short at this year's San Francisco Film Festival. He was born in Aberdeen, S.D., served in the Navy in the Korean War and was graduated from the U of Minn. in art in 1955. After several years in grad school at Berkeley, he founded Canyon Cinema, a theater and production studio for independent film-makers in Berkeley. Since 1960 he has made more than 10 short films. His latest now in production is to be called MASS. Three of his earlier shorts, EVERYMAN, THE NEWS NO. 3, and MR. HAYASHI were shown here Winter Quarter.

Following are notes apropos the films today, written by Mr. Baillie, but not for this program specifically.

THE BROOKFIELD RECREATION CENTER. Made at about the same time as the below - for the Oakland Pub. Sch. system, funny enough. I had been wanting to make films for their library for some time, on animal life, etc., in a way that I would have wished to see films when I was in grade school.

A HURRAH FOR SOLDIERS. Preceeded to PARSIFAL. From CHAPLIN, Nov., '63 Swedish film quarterly. "... a pacifist fantasy with a very strong visual power." The film is mainly"about" the soldier (I fear two things only, the shark and the soldier ... for the unseeing unthinking weapon they bear.) who inevitably walks toward us from out of the future. Thus, as with the hero, Parsifal, and he who is the center of my new film Mass, MASS, I deal with individual specific peculiar living Man.

EXCERPT FROM STATEMENT BY BRUCE BAILLIE (in application for a foundation film grant) (reprinted by permission of Mr. Baillie.)

There were ages of faith, when men made connections between themselves and the place in which they lived, the plants they cultivated, the fuel they used for warmth, their beasts, and their ancestors. My work will be discovering in American life those natural and ancient contacts through a contemporary form, the motion picture.

After I had graduated from the University of Minnesota, where I studied film under Professors Allen Downs and George Amberg, my thinking and my dreams began to turn to film form. Four years later I attended the London School of Film Technique. It was the uncertain, detached period following this, wandering through Europe, that sent me home to disciplined work for the first time in my life. I have put myself through my own school since that time, learning the fundamentals of film technique.

The main thing I have begun to learn came to me at the very first by surprise: I already possessed a fairly well developed knowledge of myself in relation to work in the theater. A friend and myself had created a theater in South Dakota, magically, deriving no outside influence I can name. I had come to know the sense of bringing an idea into life, how it was necessary to pay attention to detail, etc. I knew the shape of this kind of work. In film I would have expected to continue in the ways that were familiar to me; conceiving an idea, organizing the material and then setting about to reproduce the essential concept. Rather, I found from the first that the environment of the film itself would have a primary influence. In film I begin by committing myself to a strange environment ... "by taking that first step into darkness" (Ingmar Bergman). As I live and work there within the film I discover what it is. About three-quarters through the work I become more consciously selective, scripting after each day's shooting, studying the background to themes that are occurring, etc. It is a curious union, the poet being the most prejudiced of men. This method that is taking shape in my work, naturally determining form and content, has likely grown out of necessities not unfamiliar to other independent film-makers: The immense expense of energy and finance. Limited equipment. Undependability of environment - actors, settings, relationships, etc. And probably a natural reaction against a traditional film-making which no longer serves our time.

My most recent film, To Parsifal, is an example of this approach. When I began to work on it I had no idea I would find myself in the old European legend nor involved with Wagner's music. When I began I only knew that it was to be a tribute to summer.

(over)

I do not believe in shoddy technique. Though it is a complex medium it is possible for an individual to integrate his skills in creating, photographing, and editing sound and picture. I believe as Chagall that an artist comes to know his craft only by working at it for a very long time. It is exciting to consider that there will be poets in our time on the loose with the tools of the motion picture.

THE BURMESE HARP

Subtitled in English. Production Company: Nikkatsu Company, Ltd. Producer: Masayuki Takagi. Director: Ken Ichikawa. Script: Natto Wada. With Shoji Yasin. 1956.

The scene is Burma at the end of the War. A Japanese detachment is taken prisoner and awaits repatriation. One of its members - Misoschima, a sort of Japanese "idiot" in the Dostoevskian sense - is despatched by the British to convince a group of obstinate fighters of the official surrender.

On the way back Misoschima encounters the heaped bodies of his slain countrymen lying in the woods and on the hillsides. He is gripped by an obsession: to bury the bodies - as some sort of expiation, perhaps on the world's behalf.

His comrades wait for his return, listening for the strains of the harp he plays. A tune of his is heard - "Home Sweet Home" - but it is the English and not Misoschima playing. A wandering priest bears a curious resmeblance to Misoschima - carries, like him, a parrot on his shoulder, which the prisoners had taught to say 'Misoschima is going back to Japan'. It is Misoschima - but all the prisoners hear from him is the distant harp playing 'Home Sweet Home', followed by a Japanese song of farewell, before he disappears forever.

Two last traces of him reach the prisoners - a letter which speaks of the dead on the red soil of Burma, and another parrot which incessantly repeats, 'I can never go back'.

THE BURMESE HARP, with its curious, pacifist message, its haunting air of dedication, is one of the strangestand most beautiful of the films from Japan.

> AWARDS: San Giorgio Prize, Venice Festival, 1956; first prize, Japanese film festival, 1956; The San Giorgio prize is for the film which best shows "men's capacity to live with one another". The film has only this year become available in the U.S.

(Note on von Sternberg appearance: The U Film Society wishes to thank its regular patrons for their continuing support at the box office, which makes it possible to have such outstanding events as Mr. von Sternberg's and Miss Kael's appearance here. Please tell your friends about the other films remaining this quarter. If you don't have a season brochure, they are available in the lobby.)

COMING: April 27 THE DEAD BIRDS, an outstanding social document on the ritual wars of two New Guinea tribes; prizewinner this year in Florence. Film-maker Robert Gardner will be here (8 p.m. Mus Nat. Hist.) to introduce the film, which was made on the expedition in which Michael Rockefeller lost his life.

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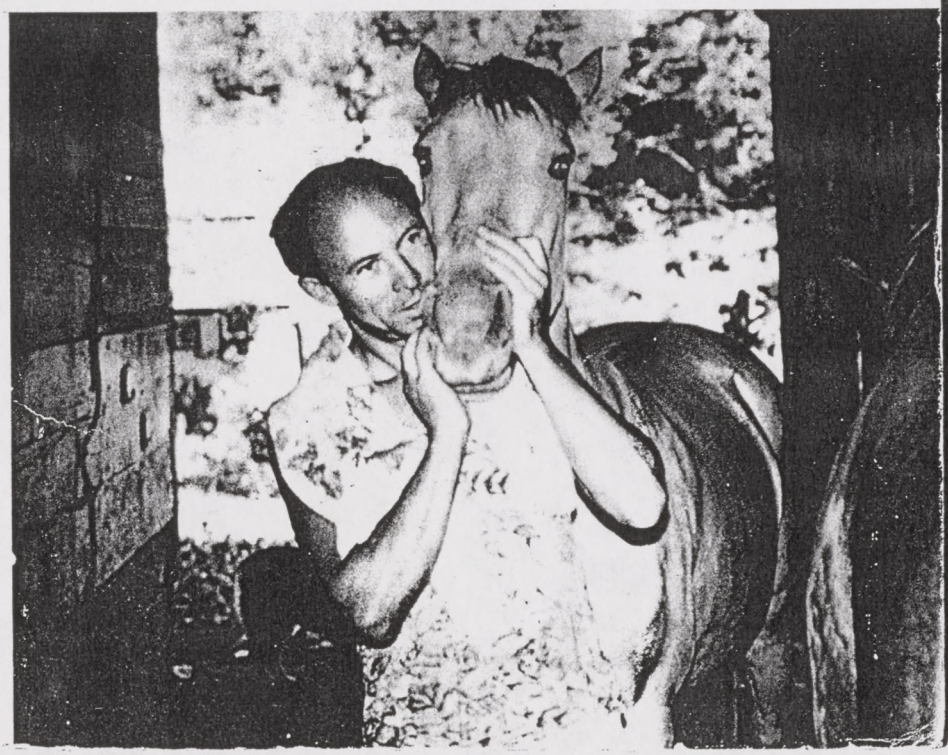
FILM CULTURE

BRUCE BAILLIE. KEN JACOBS. GEORGE LANDOW. STAN BRAKHAGE. JEROME HILL. DE BERNARDI. HOLLIS FRAMPTON. LARRY GOTTHEIM. MICHAEL SNOW. BRUCE CONNER. ROBERT BEAVERS. KENNETH ANGER. LOUISE BROOKS. ANDRE MELIES. BLAISE CENDRARS. ROBERT DESNOS. ALEXANDER HAMMID.



Noel Burch and Mike Dunford (among others) in an issue of *Afterimage* (No. 6, Summer 1976) entirely devoted to the ideology of the avant-garde film.

24. I have ducked the larger, thornier questions—what constitutes cultural struggle; relations between audience and image; the cinema apparatus; what is a documentary—in order to advance a simplified, nonpartisan argument. These questions are the stuff of other essays.
25. This is, of course, only a sampling of films and artists.
26. Corliss, p. 25.
27. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton U. Press, 1953), p. 357.

BAILLIE'S USE OF LIGHT: A READING OF HIS NOTEBOOKS

By Anthony Bannon

A divine power works in this mind and body and it is the same that works in all men, minds, plants, things—the whole world as an equal instrument of a divine action and gradual self expression.

—Bruce Baillie's Notebooks, June-July, 1970

"...to not be attracted to dull light, nor afraid of intense light. Abandon habitual propensities; be not weak."

—Bruce Baillie's Notebooks, quoted from the Tibetan *Book of the Dead.*

"More light!" declared Goethe, moments before he died, and, for its life-touching ambiguity, the poet's two-word command has persisted—a cultural legacy. It has continued to live in the memory of man because light is the sign of divinity and the natural sign of energy. Light is the spark which, through metaphor, illuminates truth and is the vehicle for beauty. It is light which

makes vision possible, and in its honor we speak of the inner light and enlightenment—we see the light—and those who are heroes are called luminaries.

The most noble activities of the mind and its most grand abstractions are described with the word "light" or with the word "sun," light's source. For instance:

Plato - "light of reason."

Christianity - "The True Light."

Zoroastrianism - "We sacrifice unto the undying, shining, swift-horsed Sun."

Hinduism (*Bhagavad-Gita*) - "Suppose a thousand suns should rise together into the sky: Such is the glory of the Shape of Infinite God."

And—also from the *Bhagavad-Gita*—an augur of the dream-image effect of film—

"The Atman is the light:
The light is covered by darkness:
This darkness is delusion:
That is why we dream."

Buddhism (The Tibetan *Book of the Dead*) - "The Clear Light of Reality" perceived upon death is the "Infallible Mind of the Dharma-Kaya," which is the state of "Perfect Enlightenment," or Buddhahood, "The purest and highest state of being."

More than any other American independent film artist, Bruce Baillie's use of light suits the metaphors given to the word. Others, such as Stan Brakhage, have employed light for its own filmic ends and explored its use with unique vision. But Baillie's work, unlike Brakhage's, employs light, especially high key situations, to express transcendent or spiritual concerns. Baillie's notebooks and study of the Tibetan *Book of the Dead* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, two works from which he has acknowledged influence, provided supporting documentation for this essay.

While most articulately realized in *Quick Billy*, the West Coast film artist's sense of light as a vehicle of transcendence is expressed in nearly every film. With the exception of several documentaries, Baillie's work may be seen as a heroic journey, seeking through movement, light and discovery the liberation provided by propitious re-birth in the next moment—if not in the next world or state of consciousness.

"I want to see everything I can see—good things in nature and people," he wrote in his notebook, June 1, 1970.

And a fragment from July 7, 1969—"...to become freer—to become innocent (freedom, through consciousness to innocence again beyond the circles of birth and death)."

If Baillie's spiritual concerns remain in question, an examination of the following should clinch conviction:

An undated list of life tenets, from the June-July 1970 Notebook—

"1. Consecration of all works.

2. Renounce attachment to [illegible] of works—or transformation of egoistic will.

3. Egoism (yields) divine purpose. (Origin of desire)."

And from the (undated) summer of 1966—"I depend on God to put me into the next environment—on which I spend my life energy. He depends on me to do the job. *I* make films, after all. *He* made me."

Baillie's notes are the cursory works of a man thinking things out. They shouldn't necessarily be taken as clear-cut explications of his work, but, more reasonably, as leaders to a general point of view. They suggest that one may view his work as expressive of a concern with the temporal discovery that leads to a spiritual justification.[1]

Indeed, Baillie himself wrote to Brakhage (and to himself in the journals) that his work exists "beyond art," as a tool for self-discovery, i.e., from Sept. 28, 1969—"Film is the discovery, rather than the reaching of a goal." Or—(July 18, 1969) "I question my art. I am so thrilled by the unexpected. The mysterious combination of things—I want to enjoy these relationships of the universe now. Art itself is much a part of this universe—but the making of art, for the time being, is like a prison to me."

Baillie's film journey to right living takes him through place (*Castro Street*), heroes (*To Parsifal* and *Quixote*), ritual (*Mass for the Dakota Sioux*), psychodrama (*Have You Thought of Talking to the Director*), structure (*Still Life* and *All My Life*) and lyricism (*Tung*).

Each film is marked by high key situations of light, often through deliberately burnt out sequences, as in *Mass*; shots into the sun, as the bursts of light breaking dark footage in *Valentin*; composing with large areas of sky dominating the frame, as in *To Parsifal* and *All My Life*; sequences with highly reflective surfaces, as the shimmering walls in *The Gymnasts* and *Have You Thought...*, and, in color films, a hot saturation of colors, as in *Quixote, Castro Street* and *To Parsifal*. Additionally, the re-occuring image of an eye, symbol not only of vision but a sign of

divine core, re-emphasizes his spiritual concerns, appearing in *To Parsifal, Quixote, Valentin* and *Quick Billy*.

That the use of light (also movement, sense of discovery and ritual) has been an integral concern of Baillie in resolving matter-spirit polarities throughout his career may be illustrated by more closely examining an early film, *On Sundays*, and his latest work, *Quick Billy*.

In the former work, a girl climbs a hill in suburban San Francisco, playing briefly with dogs.[2] She is headed toward an old house, which, with its many windows and doors, suggests a rite of passage, a means for discovery. Both the young woman and the house often are shot heroically, the frame dominated by a luminous sky.

The house is a mystifying place, fraught with potential for external and internal discovery, its walls scrawled with graffiti, an archeology for future visitors. And a mirror is hung there for reflexive vision.

Shortly, the girl becomes frightened and sees a man, silhouetted in an over-exposed, magically shimmering doorway. Unprepared for the consequences of discovery, she runs through the house, past equally shimmering windows, and out, returning to town, her movement having been foreshadowed and continued into the future of the film with repeated images of a trollycar.

Later in a park, the young woman observes a crowd gathered around a man delivering a religious speech. A sign proclaims "Devil is cruelty and hate. What are you or me? God is love"—and there are images of birds and a fountain, suggestions of renewal.

Significantly, the young woman again sees the man she earlier fled, and instead of again rejecting him she joins him on a journey through commonplace locations, images however rich with implication: An occasion of popular nourishment (popcorn in Woolworths), a ritual of wine exchange with hoboes, a judgement (physical examination of the woman by the bums, the least of men) and finally, a mythic, purifying placement of the woman, like statuary, upon a bar table.

Partly horrific in its manipulation of the woman, the film suggests, nonetheless, the rigors of purification later articulated in more complex fashion in *Quick Billy*'s Part II and III journey through an after-death state, where man experiences the threats of the Wrathful Dieties—"thought forms," Jung suggests, "which appear as realities."[3]

Not only is Baillie's poignant use of light particularly appropriate to film (as Brakhage[4] pointed out to Baillie in a letter about the latter's work in *Quick Billy*) but also appropriate to the medium in his aspiration to abstraction, nearly always attained at the expense of narrative particularity. The symbolic use of light and darkness is one of the basic factors in mythic thinking, where, in Ernest Cassirer's words, "the bursting forth of light out of darkness is the one original phenomenon."[5] Babylonians believed that the world was created in imitation of the sunrise, and that notion is echoed in the Biblical myth of creation. Indeed, the interchange of day and night—light and darkness—underlies the basic notions of space and time: Primary aspects of structure signified by diurnal changes—off and on, yes and no, light and dark. And in its rhythmic presence, observes Cassirer, there is found "a never-ending sequence of becoming."

Vision, writes Hans Jonas, "with its extended present of enduring objects, allows the distinction between change and the unchanging and therefore between becoming and being. . . Only sight, therefore, provides the sensual basis on which the mind may conceive the idea of the eternal, that which never changes and is always present."[6] The power of the moving, manipulated image has a tremendous evocative power. In the hands of an artist such as Baillie, it leads to a belief which overcomes reason. It performs what man rarely achieves: Restructuring space and time.

On Sept. 14, 1966, Baillie's only entry in his journal was the following: "It gets to be that everything you do is wild and sacred."

Two years later, he began work on *Quick Billy*, a wild and sacred movie. One way to look at the movie is in terms of the relationships it establishes between:

The artist and the world outside himself (natural environment, animals, women);

The artist and himself (dream images, non-representational shapes, mysterious figures, a diary-form sound track and archival images from his past);

And between the artist and his medium (images of Baillie shooting film, sound of him discussing what "will be in" the finished film and a final reel showing the artist as performer in an Old West sequence assembled in the style of early American silent cinema).

Another way to see *Quick Billy*, a way which builds from the above, is as an imagination of the archetypal symbols of the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*. Baillie's notebooks from 1967 to 1971 are rife with references to "The T.B. of D." and to its vision of man seeking re-birth in the symbolic *Bardo* state, a state following death during which one is confronted with the options of existence in the void of Buddhahood or in a variety of re-birth forms. The notes, such as the one which follows (from Nov. 11, 1969), refer to the spirit, if not the substance, of the Buddhist holy book.

". . . the one moment (of reality-release/freedom-through animality ('one's nature')—fear of taking those 1st steps—away from ('one's nature'—innocence*)—away from the only *known* (*seeming*) reality - sensuality, the fiercely possessive and unstable - nature of *the beast* the illusion of reality (phenomena) the trip (that is to say - the parade of *karmic* imagining which is the result of the shadow of reality - the other face of - the unmasking of - our deeds - our doing - our becoming - the awful mask of revelry - sadism being only an extreme demon of the normal search for pleasure - which is the universal search for wholeness/holiness or liberation (Buddhism)."

The parentheses are not closed in his text. The punctuation is Baillie's. The asterisk refers to the following: "*Toward a conscious union - again - with innocence, this 'fusion' is called *liberation* or being."

Baillie's notebooks also indicate a separation according to reels in *Quick Billy*, the first reel to "the Peaceful Dieties" of the *Bardo*, the second to the "Wrathful Dieties," the third labeled "birth" or "re-birth" and including a "persuit, judgement, flame . . . sex, dreams, heroes and 8 mm theater" to demonstrate "primitive (childish) innocence" and in the fourth reel, "actors, in fact, self, becoming children."

The notebooks also suggest the possibility of color coding, by reproducing the color symbols of the Tibetan Book:

Water - blue, white - principle of consciousness - navel
Earth - yellow (touch) (root)
Fire - red - feelings, heart
Air - green - volition, throat.

While *Quick Billy* is no mere visual translation of the *Bardo*, the *Book of the Dead* does provide many clear links to the film. For example, the following lines from the introduction of the Tibetan book (which describes a "Pure Truth" experience) also are a lyric expression of the first images in *Quick Billy*:

. . .subtle, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome, in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in springtime in one continuous stream of vibrations. . . From the midst of that radiance, the natural sound of reality, reverberating like a thousand thunders simultaneously sounding, will come. That is the natural sound of thine own real self.

The beginning sequence of the film also provides a direct color linkage to the first three days of *Bardo* existence. In the film, the first color seen is the deep blue of the leader, next a brilliant white light of the sun shot out of focus, gradually turning yellow at the peripheries and breaking into three distinct areas. Likewise, the first three days of the *Bardo* are represented this way:

On the first day, "the whole heavens will appear blue," from which *Bhagavan Vairochana* (source of all organic life) will appear, "white in color and seated upon a lion throne." On the second day, "the pure form of water will shine as a white light," and on the third, "the primal form of the element earth will shine forth as yellow light. . . glorified with orbs having satellite orbs of radiance, so clear and bright that the eye can scarcely look at it."

After establishing a close association with the radiantly fearful but peace-giving lights of the Buddha, the first reel continues with associations established in the first several minutes, such as the lion which brought *Bhagavan Vairochana*, images of the sea and land, shots dominated by the sky (heaven), the horse and jewels of the third day Buddha form and variations on the original color theme, with sounds generally peaceful.

The second reel suggests the Wrathful Dieties of the eighth through 14th day of the *Bardo*, "flame enhaloes, wrathful, blood drinking dieties come to dawn, who are only the former Peaceful Dieties in changed aspect." The colors of these dieties are dark, as is much of the second reel, and they make horrific noises, as does the sound track of Reel II, the beginning section of which is dense with *Bardo* associations—shadowy apparitions, flashes of light from a darkened frame, bones.

The latter part of the reel especially suggests the *Sidpa Bardo*. If the dead person has rejected the pull of the Peaceful and Wrathful Dieties, he must travel through this intermediate stage, seeking a re-birth. During this stage, the person "will see places (familiarly known on the earth-plane) and relatives as one seeth another in dreams. . . There will be a grey twilight-like light" and

one will have illusions of being "persued by various terrible beasts of prey." Additionally, one will be confronted by "smoke colored light from the hell world," and will have visions of "males and females in union." And there will be a judgement, where "the lord of death will say, 'I will consult the Mirror of Karma.'"

Animals—bears, snakes, lions, tigers, the eye of a creature—inhabit the second reel of *Quick Billy*, and a long scene is shot through the smoke and heat of a dump. The sound here is often clangorous, and, when verbal, it suggests the self-doubt of one unable to recognize the "bright void state of thine own intellect." For example, this passage heard over images of a snake:

"I'm not capable of anything. Why? Why? Why?. . . I'm not the guy to wind up in that kind of a lion's pit. What the hell am I doing, see. I'm no fuckin' bum. I'm an intelligent person, and I can't understand it, see. . ."

The Judgement—Baillie sadly looking into the mirror of the camera preceeded by images of a shrouded person fleeing at night—appears in Reel III with a long sequence of intercourse and 8 mm superimpositions of home-life followed by a sequence of what Baillie refers to as "cock suck."

The fourth reel, having little to do with light or the *Bardo*, releases the film from its introspection, externalizing its maker and releasing him from further deep revelation with the evasive, mock heroic words, "Ever Westward, Eternal Rider," ever Westward to new discovery, to new work, as suggested by the four final unedited 100 foot reels, to new "frightening brilliance."

"Frightening brilliance," he wrote July 16, 1970, "the sun, the ocean, the stars, the flame, the green jewels emanating rainbow, the parade of dieties, frightening surely, rarely encountered during normal experience. . ."

And from later that same day: "The woods when I am alone is peopled with the radiant dieties of my own being, frightening me."

This is man, as he termed it Sept. 17, 1969, "stretched between heaven and hell" engaged in "flirts between 'good' and 'evil.'"

It is also a man who wrote (Nov. 11, 1969): "Do you know what rainbow means? It is a family. That is, a sparkling radiating spectrum of light, which comes from within, pure delight (pure light) projected out into the world—containing all those beloved members of one's inner family—springing from that one center of joy."

NOTES

1. This synecdoche is best expressed in *Valentin de las Sierras* a short Baillie film using as image-source a Mexican family. Stylistic elements in the film such as extreme close-up composition, high contrast lighting and energetic camera movements, encourage a part-for-whole reading. More than any other of his films, *Valentin* directly illustrates Baillie's excitement with discovery of abstract, life-assenting qualities emerging from mundane, daily perceived objects.
2. Baillie's recurring interest in animals suggests another motif in his work, a pan-concern for living things and an articulation that all created things are unified in a web of interaction.
3. Appearing in the foreward to the Tibetan *Book of the Dead* (p. xlviii), compiled and edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford University Press, 1968.
4. Brakhage wrote Baillie on Jan. 15, 1969, after having seen a reel of *Quick Billy* footage: "You, as I, seem to be taking strong advantage of film's most unique possibility—preservation of the track of light in the field of vision..."
5. *Mythic Thought in the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, by Ernest Cassirer, Vol. II, (New Haven, 1955), p. 96.
6. *The Phenomenon of Life*, by Hans Jonas, Dell Publishing Co. (New York, 1968), pp. 144-45.

KENNETH JACOBS, INTERVIEWED BY LINDLEY HANLON [JERRY SIMS PRESENT] APRIL 9, 1974

[Mae West songs play in the background; Jerry Sims comes in on the percussion; sounds of *Little Stabs at Happiness* and *Blonde Cobra*...]

HANLON: All those ridiculous distinctions between art and life that people make are proven right here.

JACOBS: I agree.

[Jacobs and Sims discuss a letter to be written in behalf of Sims to the Welfare Department to the effect that Jacobs employs Sims as an actor to qualify him for food stamps.]

JACOBS: Do you know today's date?

SIMS: April the Ninth, 1931.

JACOBS: 1931?

SIMS: No, '21. '31.

JACOBS: 19...?

SIMS: 48? I don't know. Forget it.

JACOBS: It's '74.

SIMS: '74? O.K. '47. '74. 1999. 1933. Who cares....

SIMS: Oh, incidentally, did you see the book *The Bad Guys*?

JACOBS: Yeah.

SIMS: I'd very, very, very much appreciate a paperback edition of that for my birthday if I live to be...ah...

JACOBS: I'll be glad to get it for you.

SIMS: Maybe you and Bob can collaborate, can go halvies on getting it for me for my next birthday, if I live that long.

JACOBS: What does the paperback cost?

SIMS: It's about $5 something.

JACOBS: Hmmm...

SIMS: It's a very inconsequential sum which would give me so much enjoyment out of it if I had it. [etc.] I'll bless you if I can sometime. Let me see that George Olson record.

JACOBS: Yes, I'd like you to meet Art Spiegelman while he's in New York before he goes back to San Francisco.

SIMS: San Francisco, is that where he lives? What street? What address?

JACOBS: He lives on Abbey Street.

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CINEMATHEQUE

May 24, 2007

Dear Bruce Baillie:

Enclosed is a W-9 form. Please fill it out and return to San Francisco Cinematheque. We need your Tax ID number for our financial records in the event we need to send you a 1099 form.

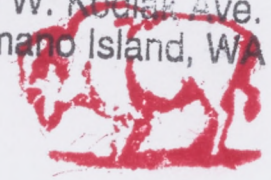
Best,

Jennifer Blaylock
Programs Associate

Hi guys!
thanks
B.B.-

Hope to see
you again
soon.
Now.

Bruce Baillie
Lorie A. Baillie
669 W. Kodiak Ave. 387-1081
Camano Island, WA 98282



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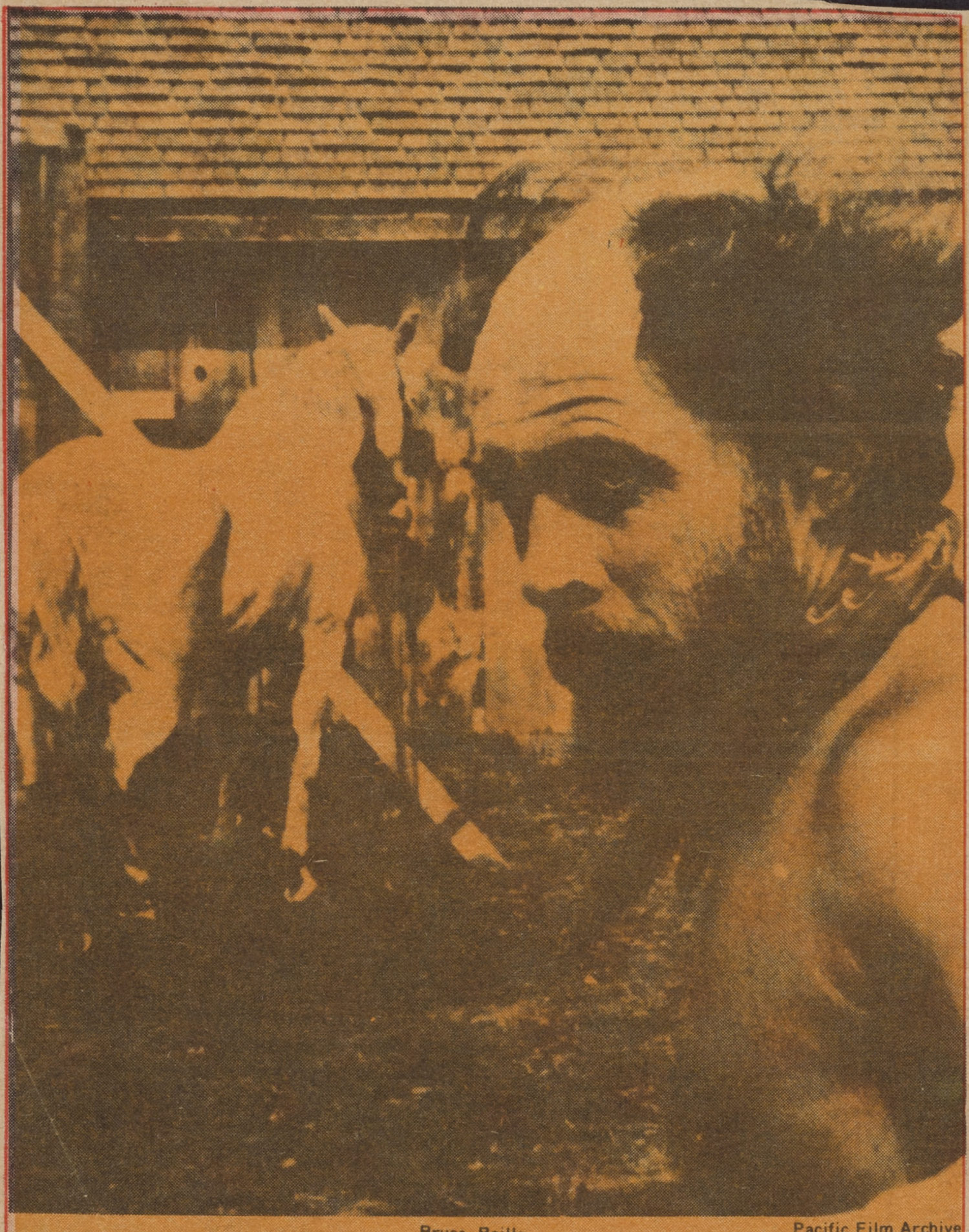
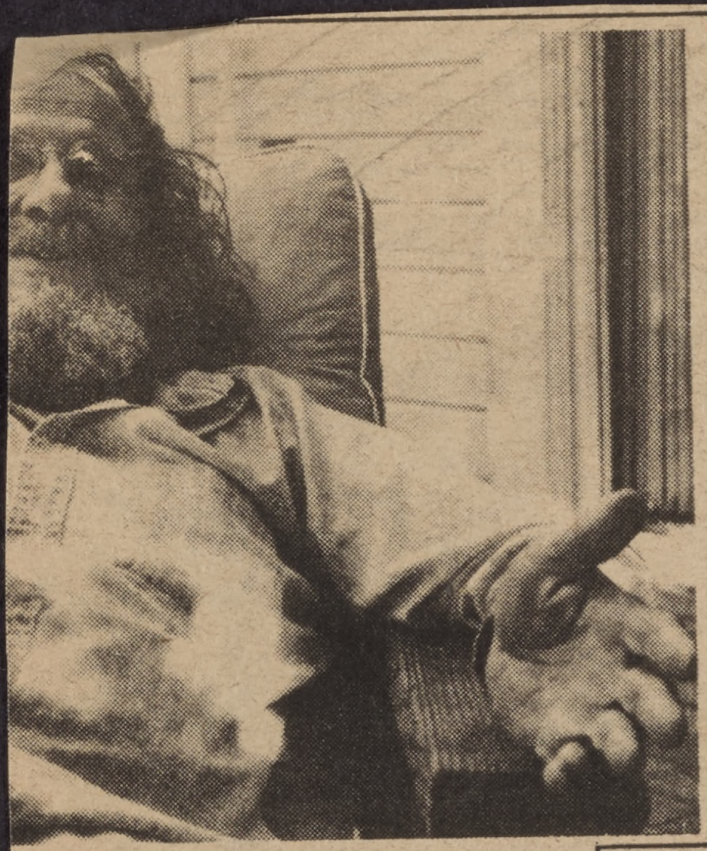


Bruce Baille

Pacific Film Archive



Janet Fries

n tribe

ax Scherr

esent, it is being written in the same kitchen

straight press the statement by Steve Haines,
per to the brink of destruction."

y and sadly, is being played by a group that
n Tribe and uses a wine label as its banner.
n reverted to the juice-heads? Besides being
the drug revolution and then pass a joint --
s.

was the office. They washed there. They ate
y put out a paper that had the feeling of love.
relationship. This was truly a family, and at
s current tribe can attest, the money was not

n absentee owner. Nobody worked any harder
ned or forced or cajoled or fooled in any way
s nobody is fooled or cajoled to do anything in
y 40 or so self-proclaimed leaders.
ne contrary, ever decided to ruin any person
is cannot be said of the Red Mountain Tribe;
They are using the institutions of the

tribe

by S

I first met Max Scherr in Robbie's
a thin, sloppy sheet called the **Berkel**
poorly laid out, but very tough.

It was Max, almost alone, who saw
and had the willingness to make the e

The **Barb** grew steadily in circulat
vertising. I remember the happy da
Max was still selling it on the street

I did not have much to do with th
writing a few articles and vending in
Max Scherr. He was the first old ma
right to put down young people for la

One time Max called me into his o
tor. The last editor was a friend of
he wasn't around, it would be great f

We got to talking about wages. I
movement survival wage. This wou
to work for less.

Max gave me a big lecture about id
He suggested I work for nothing an
maybe he could give me a little mone

with Mr.Baillie, April 20 1 486x351 pixels

Cinemanic: An occasional column on film

Sometime around 1967 Bruce Baillie found himself locked in a near-fatal dance with hepatitis. Having shared in same dance, the space is not unfamiliar to me. He began, at this time, a film/sound composition he was to work on for more than three years.

The completed film was titled **Quick Billy**, an hour long summoning of the principles of transformation and divided into four separate reels. The film is a masterpiece of mystical vision. Though it is five years old, it appears as timeless as work by Blake or Brakhage.

With multiple impositions of sea, moon, sun, earth, animal, human floating and swirling across, up and down the screen, Baillie penetrates the surface of perception and transforms the particular into the universal, vast, ceaselessly in motion. The transfiguration of light in this film prefaces Stan Brakhage's most recent work, **Text Of Light.**

While both filmmakers seem to be concerned with seeing through particular phenomenon to the unifying essence beneath their objective reality, that is with film, Light, Baillie maintains a symbolic usage to correspond with his mind's state. Brakhage seeks to remove "self" content allowing for the unspecified leaving perceptual information in the minds of the audience.

Where three reels of **Quick Billy** are made up with this cascade of earth, air, fire, water and flesh stemming from Baillie's study of the **Bardo Thodol**, The Tibetan Book Of The Dead, the fourth is a sleight-of-hand parody of the Cowboy Movie done in monochrome, D.W. Griffith/Murnau style of arch silent filmmaking complete with cacophonous old-timey fiddle and banjo music.

Baillie plays **Quick Billy**, a raunchy rapist of a Kansas cowboy. It's a raw theatricality that counterpoints, slaps across the pristine mystical visions of the other reels, leaving the image of "**Quick Billy**" as a metaphor of human-as-animal loose upon the earth.

The **Rolls** which accompany the film began as correspondence between Baillie and Brakhage during the construction of **Quick Billy.** Baillie has described them as "artifacts from the descending layers of an archeological dig." They are silent, three-minute rolls, some of which were made in 1968-69.

Two additional rolls have been added since the film was first shown in 1970 and Baillie moved from the sea ranch near Fort Bragg to the East Coast. They are like vestiges from the period of making **Quick Billy**, recurrences of visions from that mind-state.

Baillie's film was shown this week at Canyon Cinematheque, which he founded in 1961. Perhaps The Pacific Film Archive or the San Francisco Museum could mount a complete retrospective of Baillie's work.

The groundwork for much being done in independent film today, was laid by Baillie's films. Like Brakhage, he is a transition figure between filmmaking in the Sixties and current work.

* * *

Next week at Canyon Cinematheque, March 27, Ken Jacobs' **Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son** will be shown in its most recent version which includes an added 29-minute section. This makes at least four versions of Jacobs' rephotographed breakdown of a film made in 1905, possibly by Billy Bitzer, D. W. Griffith's cameraman.

Jacobs rescued the film by a paper print. It is exhaustingly taken apart nearly grain by grain, augmenting its original running time of ten minutes into over two hours of loving perusal.

Ken said: 'Ghosts! Cine-recordings of the vivacious doings of persons long dead. The preservation of their memory ceases at the edges of the frame (a 1905 hand happened to stick into the frame....it's preserved, recorded in a spray of emulsion grains). One face passes 'behind' another on the two-dimensional screen.

"I wanted to show the actual present of film, just to begin to indicate its energy. A train of images passes like enough and different enough to imply to the mind that its eyes are seeing an arm lift, or a door close.

"I wanted to 'bring to the surface' that multi-rhythmic collision-contesting of dark and light two-dimensional force-areas struggling edge to edge for identity of shape ... to get to the amoebic grain pattern itself ... a chemical dispersion pattern unique to each frame, each cold still ... the teeming energies elicited (the grains! the grains!) then collaborating, unknowingly and ironically, to form the always-poignant-because-always-past illusion."

In the last version of **Tom, Tom** which I saw there was this wonder-filled moment when Ken literally peels away the screen, leaving the projector bulb flickering into the eyes. You haven't seen film until you see **Tom, Tom.**

Jacobs exposes its usually hidden seductiveness leaving the viewer alone with its own eyes. Like rubbing a clod of earth between your hands until its reduced to its individual particles, dissolution results.

Tom, Tom becomes a perceptual analysis beneath the rational or discursive, a sensual process of revelation within the viewer's interior.

The film begins at 8:30 in the San Francisco Art Institute.

Notes Of Interest:

The Great Mother of American independent film, Maya Deren will have her films shown at the San Francisco Art Museum, March 28 at 8:30. She pioneered the personal/poetic film with her work in the late Forties.

Meshes Of The Afternoon, Choreography For Camera, At Land, Meditations On Violence, and **Ritual In Transfigured Time** are works that transformed the possibilities of filmmaking from conventional, literary forms into the realms of cinematic trance and personal mytho-poetics.

Monday, the 24th at the Pacific Film Archive, Michael Snow's **Rameau's Nephew** will be shown at 7:30. Possibly, it will be the last opportunity to see this film for some time. Admission is $2.75 and the film runs for 4 hours and 20 minutes.

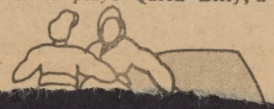
The 26th at the Archive is the premiere of **I'm A Stranger Here Myself: A Portrait Of Nicholas Ray.** It is a 55-minute documentary on the director of **Johnny Guitar, Rebel Without A Cause, They Live By Night, Bitter Victory** and **In A Lonely Place** filmed by David Helpern, Jr. and James C. Gutman.

In the film are Nicholas Ray, John Houseman, Francois Truffaut and Natalie Wood. It is narrated by Howard de Silva, the fine actor who played in **They Live By Night,** Ray's first film.

Also: Be looking forward to the Pacific Film Archive's mammoth three-month series of Music In The Cinema, beginning next month. Having seen the tentative schedule, it promises films on music and musicians that run the gamut from Bessie Smith, Cab Calloway, and Charlie Parker to Glenn Gould, Bob Dylan, Albert Ayler and the Rolling Stones ... Got to be something in there for everybody.

Will transmit more information as the series nears its opening. -- M.R.

Bruce Baillie, master of mystical vision



Funny Films From Russia

Theater West Of San Pablo

by Berna Rauch

It's a pleasure to tell you that theater is alive and well and kicking up its heels in west Berkeley. Two companies are currently performing in the low-rent district west of San Pablo Avenue. New City Theater is doing Brendan Behan's **The Hostage.** And the Performance Workshop of the Jean Shelton Acting School is offering **Forensic and the Navigators** and **Kill the Sea.** Both companies offer you good entertainment at low, low prices.

I'll tell you about both shows, so you can give priority to the one that interests you more. But, whether you see one or both, the important thing is that you'll leave the theater feeling more alive than you did when you went in. And that, my friends, is what theater with real-human-being-actors is about.

* * * * *

The Hostage is a rollicking, rowdy, bawdy, life-loving, song-filled show about war and killing. Brendan Behan's 1955 play about the I.R.A.'s struggle is as current as this week's headlines. Twenty years have passed and the only real change in Ireland has been an escalation of the conflict.

The essence of the play is serious. The plot revolves around the kidnapping of a British (i.e. Cockney) soldier in retaliation for the execution of an Irish patriot. But Behan is Behan is Behan. And because he's so madly in love with life -- absolutely wallowing in humor and joy -- his statement about death is that much more powerful and moving.

Every line of Behan's writing says life is good. He reaches you with love and laughter and spares you the sermons. It works beautifully. Death in the midst of vivid life is the most senseless death of all. **The Hostage** is the kind of play in which a dead man comes back to life in order to join the rest of the cast in singing the finale ("There's no place

He tells us, "It's not a natural thing for a man with a sense of humor to be fightin'...The worst part of prison is all those religious-minded patriots in along with you...My father was the parish priest...The Virgin Mary was created under the Special Powers Act by the Holy Ghost... So you're a terrorist for St. Vincent de Paul."

Nor does Behan spare himself. At one point in the merriment, everyone onstage starts swearing at Brendan Behan, accusing him of being anti-Irish and a few other things. In short, Behan has that perfect sense of balance which calls attention to the sublime by showing us how ridiculous we really are.

The production itself is a delight. James Jameson has done a marvelous job of directing the large cast. There are constant changes of pace and the energy flows as freely as the booze. Leo Downey and Susan Chapman are especially good in the lead roles of Pat and Meg. And I liked Lynn Soffer and David Marquis in two of the supporting roles. Soffer is a tipsy, super-

'Forensic and the Navigators' at the Jean Shelton Acting School

about climbing up onto the stage and grabbing a bottle of Guinness. (I checked with an actress later and found out it was root beer. Which proves that the Irish can get blind drunk on soda pop if it comes in Guinness bottles.)

You can see **The Hostage** at 1819 Tenth St., Berkeley Fridays & Saturdays at 8:30, thru April 5th. Costs $2.50, and is well worth it.

Meanwhile, over on Eighth Street, the Shelton School's Performance Workshop is doing something else. And when I say "something else," I mean it, because Sam Shepard's **Forensic and the Navigators** is a far out, trippy, almost indescribably theatrical experience.

Shepard is one of the most innovative, unique playwrights around today. You don't watch his plays. You experience them. It's as if he grabs you by the

showing us just how funny violence and sex and paranoia and ugliness and conspiracy are. But I can't be sure. Neither can two directors I talked to. Peter Tripp, who directed **Forensic,** said, "We just started doing it and the actors got caught up in it." And Bob Elross, talking about another Shepard play, commented, "I don't know exactly what he's saying, but Shepard is on to something."

The Workshop is a perfect setting for Shepard's adventurous theater. The space is small and intimate. The audience is immediately and magnetically pulled into the action. From the moment the actors start setting up the props, you know this is theater with a **difference.** The actors are alive, communicating, interacting with you. And, unless you're catatonic or dead, you can't help but get into the play. When you're in, you're in. There's no way out, nor would you want there to be.

What can I tell you about **Forensic?** That I saw the world's most phallic pancake eaten by Oolan while she was wearing her Lucy sweatshirt? That a weird, met's throat; and almost everyone put wads of chewing gum into the typewriter?

Peter Tripp's direction is highly imaginative and Suzanne Voss is marvelous as Oolan. I had one helluva good time experiencing **Forensic.** I think the actors did, too. It's the funniest, bounciest, most alive production I've seen at the Workshop.

The curtain-raiser for the Workshop's program, **Kill the Sea,** is an original play by a promising young Berkeley playwright, Mitchell Zeftel. Zeftel has a fine feeling for language and his play has an engaging quality about it.

Kill the Sea shows us four people, an English couple and an American couple, hating each other and every minute of their vacation in Italy. They talk out loud without communicating. It's a kind of parallel-talk-without-listening. Except for fear and hostility. They do hear each other's hatred and anger.

It's a rather interesting sketch of zombies who aren't even alive enough to enjoy the sea, much less themselves or each other. I enjoyed **Kill the Sea** and hope to see more of Zeftel's work in the future.

The Performance Workshop's double bill will be at 2525 Eighth St., Berkeley, through April 6th. Curtain at 8:30 on Fridays & Saturdays, 5 pm on Sundays. Costs $2.

* * * * *

BRIEFLY NOTED:

Dropped in for the Expoetry Express's one performance in Berkeley last week. Had a good time laughing, because I happen to dig the far out and outrageous. If you're a traditionalist who believes sanity, sanitation, or survival is sacred, then they're not for you.

However, if you dig someone in the audience screaming, "This isn't poetry, man," and threatening to kill the performers, you'll enjoy them. Maybe they'll be back again and you can see 'em.

Another great thing about the Expoets is that it doesn't cost to see them. In fact, they pay

Romance in Roslyn

Amy Taubin

Bruce Baillie
A Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)
Parts I & II
Anthology Film Archives

Bruce Baillie has made two exquisite short films, *All My Life* and *Still Life*. His large films, *Quixote* and *Quick Billy*, although brilliant in part, have never really held together for me.

A Roslyn Romance, Baillie's most recent film (the Parts I & II of the title seem to indicate that it is not yet complete) is his richest and most mature work. Here, he has extended the precision and density of the short films to a more complex form.

Very little has been written about the relation of the filmmakers of the New American Cinema to Bazinian film theory; the main emphasis is always placed on the anti-illusionist aspect of these films. But in the work of the film diarists — like Jonas Mekas, Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow — there is the echo of Bazin, particularly of his essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," which relates photography and film to "the mummy complex," to the making of images as a defense against the passage of time, against death. While photographs offer us "lives halted in a set moment of their duration, freed from their destiny," film is "the image of things and of their duration, change mummified as it were."

The central image of *A Roslyn Romance* is a freeze-frame, a hybrid image neither still nor moving. An elderly man is seated in a straight-backed chair with his head tipped back while an elderly woman bends over him holding a razor which is poised over his throat. The image is frozen for several seconds to the sounds of howling wind and a droning airplane. This awesome film image speaks of the awesomeness of intimacy — of a history of lives lived in the interdependence, respect, trust, habituation and proximity — and of the duration of this relationship, compressed and mummified in this image which is both within and without time.

The 20-minute film spans fall and winter (Part I & Part II). A small number of elements are combined and recombined in a very complex manner. The images are a collection of old photographs and postcards on a table — the elderly couple, leaves and branches, children sledding, the interior of a country house and its yard, snow, a series of titles from a diary written in the '70s, and a younger man who is perhaps the filmmaker. The sounds are wind, the airplane, bells, accordian music and a conversation between an elderly woman with a heavy European accent and a younger man, again perhaps the filmmaker.

The film has signs of being a diary, but the relationship of the filmmaker to the sounds and images that he records is never specified. Nor is the relationship of the people in the photographs to one another, nor that of the man on the sound tract to the woman on the sound track, nor that of any of the people filmed to one another.

A romance is a literary form characterized through its long history from the Greeks through the nineteenth century by exotic adventure and tales of courtly and idealized love. And for me, and perhaps for Baillie, the lives of these old people in Roslyn, Long Island, is distant and exotic. How distant am I, a modern feminist, from the voice of that woman, laughingly describing someone as "a good man" and implying that a lifetime of obedience and respect and love could be founded on a woman's respect for that goodness.

Baillie dedicates the film to his mother. I'm sure she likes it tremendously. But I do too and I can think of very few contemporary works which can mediate two such different sensibilities and experiences as ours must be. •

Continued from previous page

tense exchanges such as this, and passion, but Tavernier's point is that their relationship never grows and it's a flaw in the film that we're not sure why. Like his protagonist, so reluctant to speak of private matters and particularly of his wife, Tavernier holds back too much too long. In an epilogue, both Bernard and Tavernier appear to lament the bruised soul of the girl, the plight of tenants in Paris, the wounded in and among us. But what of Bernard himself? After all, he betrays wife for work and adventure; is incapable of hearing Ann's woes and small talk above his own cinema worries; is unwilling or unable to reveal himself or, as Ann points out, "risk" anything. What are we to make of him, and what peculiar insight into others gives him the right to speak to us? From his point of view, albeit "*gate*," we are asked to perceive the casualties of politics and everyday life; and despite its many felicities, *Spoiled Children* hasn't the richness to support this perspective.

Still, *Spoiled Children* is an ambitious work with nice touches, and the worthiest entry so far in a laudable program — "Perspectives," that is — that in the past brought us *Cousin, Cousine*, Agnes Varda's *Daguerreotypes*, and many small French productions that might otherwise never have seen these shores. •

Fingers at Changes: Jim Brown, Tisa Farrow and Harvey Keitel

Knuckle Sandwich

Stephen Saban

Fingers
Cinema II
60 St. & 3 Av.

This film is so sordid and depressing, so shallow while pretending to depth, that it demands to be nit-picked.

In the opening scene, Jimmy Angelelli (Harvey Keitel) sits in his lushly appointed upper east side apartment playing the Bach E-Minor Toccata on his grand piano. The camera moves slowly over the piano to his fingers on the keyboard. His fingering is so unrelated to the music that only a moron would be fooled. Jimmy is an aspiring concert pianist, but collects debts for his small-time underworld-type father on the side. He doesn't like doing it, but what's a son gonna do — you gotta please your father. Outside the closed window, on the sidewalk (waiting for a bus or a buss?), is a woman listening to the piano from at least two stories down. They make meaningful eye contact and Jimmy falls in love with her. He runs downstairs, plays "Summertime, summertime, sum sum summertime" on his cassette player for her and drives her home. It is winter, but Jimmy has his convertible's top down. She lives in Soho, 76 Greene Street, to be exact. She gets out of the car and goes inside. Pause, pause. He follows her. She hasn't locked the downstairs door, nor the door to her loft, the floor of which Jimmy instinctively knows. He enters. She's an artist. She makes plasticine heads and charcoal sketches, which mercifully are left uncredited. They engage in sparkling conversation.

She: "Would you like some wine?"

They have red wine and some heavy but silent kissing. She breaks away from him and starts to make a phone call.

He: "What're you doing? Don't you know that . . . Don't you understand? I'm going to bring you into your dreams of yourself. All you have to do is believe in me."

She goes over to the mirror and brushes her hair.

She: "You're so fulla shit."

He: "No, I mean it. I do."

Long pause, hysterically pregnant, then she says, "Carol."

He: "Carol what?"

She: "Just Carol."

He: "Listen, lemme . . . lemme ask you a question. If you didn't want to . . . "

She: "I did."

He leaves.

So far, so so-so. Some interest has been stirred up. Why is this twitching nervous wreck of an Italian in love with Carol (Tisa Farrow)? Why is he a twitching nervous wreck? Why is Carol such a mindless nothing? Why is she so boring? Is she on drugs? Is she retarded? Why has she been given lines to speak? We never find out.

Carol spends a lot of time walking around and staring. When she has direction, she goes to Changes, the bar/-restaurant at Broome and Mercer. Changes, for the film, has been changed into a mysterious club where Jim Brown plays a character named Dreems (his name is not spelled out in the movie, so why isn't it Dreams?), who is black and keeps a ring of white girls for some purpose. Probably nefarious. Carol always uses the Mercer Street door, even though a sign on the door informs, "Please Use Broome Street Entrance." Inside, it says "Please Use Broome Street Exit," but Carol and the film crew ignore it. This mysterious and wicked club sells pecan pie for $1.25, just like the real Changes does.

At lunch with his father, Ben (Michael V. Gazzo), at Mama Sitka's on West Broadway, Jimmy is cruised quite obviously by a blond bartender. For no reason. We never see the bartender again. Ben tells Jimmy to collect a gambling debt for him. Jimmy does a lot of twitching and question-evading and we begin to question his sanity.

Jimmy cases out a private health club where the debtor hangs out. Jimmy comes and goes from the club with ease and orders a tea with lemon, please, even though he looks shifty and is carrying a big cassette player. Maybe he's a member.

In a park on 57th Street, Jimmy has a rendezvous with some unsavory types and then a run-in with a cop. All the while, there is a little blond girl self-consciously playing by herself, jumping, skipping, turning cartwheels. Her spontaneity is artificial. Jimmy makes meaningful eye contact with her, and she with him. Is he in love with her? Will he offer to drive her home? Is she an orphan? Like the blond bartender, nothing is made of the implications and we never see her again.

Meanwhile, he is having trouble with his "dick," and has to turn on the water in a men's room to urinate. He visits a urologist and we are treated to an unpleasant prostate examination.

There are a couple of sex scenes in *Fingers*. Jimmy and the women are clothed in both of them. Jimmy merely drops his jeans to mid-buttock level and goes at it. Pant pant puff puff grunt. No wonder he's having trouble with his dick — it's probably ripped to shreds on his zipper.

Jimmy keeps after Carol, who is so enigmatic that we lose interest in her after

subscribe

COLLECTIVE for Living Cinema
52 WHITE ST. 925-2111
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BARRY GERSON
FRI MARCH 12 8p.m.
Screening of:
WATER (1968); CONTEMPLATING (1968); BEADED LIGHT (1970); DISSOLVING (1970); BEYOND (1970); TRANSLUCENT APPEARANCES (1975)

The Poetics of Bruce Baillie

RAYMOND FOERY

Bruce Baillie Works
Film Forum

The work of Bruce Baillie provides some of the most cogent examples of what Jonas Mekas has called "film poetry" and what P. Adams Sitney has labeled "lyrical film." Baillie is, pure and simple, an American poet, and his evocative images have often described the circle, in cinematic terms, from Walt Whitman to Lawrence Ferlinghetti. His films flow with the ease of the well-turned phrase, and yet his imagery is often as complex and meticulously constructed as is the interiorized vision of a haiku writer. And this is a key to his work, for Baillie combines a real and experiential understanding of the American landscape with a personal Eastern philosophical construct.

Thus in a film like *Castro Street*, the images are distinctly American and clearly manmade, yet the form owes some of its inspiration to oriental textures and rhythms. The result is a synthesis, perhaps too eclectic for some, of elements from two cultures, the one at times juxtaposed to, at times superimposed over, the other. Despite the layered textures of *Castro Street*, the film is direct and even visceral in its effect. Like so much of Baillie's work, *Castro Street* reaches the soul as well as the mind; Baillie's films have the grace and power to be felt by large audiences, while at the same time appealing in the most serious way to other filmmakers and to patrons of the avant-garde. He is a personal filmmaker whose personality is accessible as well as complex, whose vision is obvious as well as demanding.

Quixote, for example, is a very demanding film, and yet its central vision—that of the relationship of the sensitive individual to the often insensitive 20th century environment—is clear. *Quixote*, though, seems much more loosely structured than, say, *Castro Street* or *Valentin de las Sierras*, and audiences often fail to find the essential thread of the film within the overwhelming collage of the imagery.

This may also be true of *Mass For The Dakota Sioux*, Baillie's most overtly political work and one which contains several levels of pictorial "meaning." Yet both films are carefully structured and rhythmically sound. *Mass* uses the parts of the Catholic ceremony to provide not only a shaping force but also a level of political commentary. *Quixote* uses the very reference embodied by the title itself to allow the film to make its journey through the contemporary (1965-7) scene in a manner not unlike the Cervantes original.

Continued on Page 28

SVN 3-11-76

Baillie

Continued from Page 27

Baillie's more recent work seems to reflect what we know to be his very personal desire to clarify and simplify the structures of the life process. He has in recent years withdrawn to a small shed on the Hudson River where he is at work on a long autobiographical film based on his experiences in the small town of Roslyn, Washington. The form of this film seems to represent the fruition of a concept that has intrigued Baillie for some time now, that of the "post card" film, a simple work that can communicate directly and without embellishment from one human being (or group) to another human being (or group).

Of his earlier works, the beautiful and simple *All My Life* is probably the closest to this esthetic. A short piece (3 minutes), the totality of which is one long pan along a rose-covered fence accompanied by an Ella Fitzgerald recording, the film is a perfect little jewel. It is full and rich within itself, with no need to be cut or polished. Some would say that the inspiration for *All My Life* is akin to the minimalist tradition of American art of the late 1960s, but I think this is a misleading theory.

Baillie has said that he believes that films must arise out of life, not out of other films, and this view seems clearly stated in *All My Life*. It is a view which at the same time distinguishes Baillie, who spent some formative years on the west coast, from many of the "New York School" of personal filmmakers who draw inspiration and force from a reexamination of previous (usually old silent) films. It's quite true, in fact, that those who speak of the differences between East Coast and West Coast American filmmakers often site Bruce Baillie as a prime example of the latter. By now, however, his films are well known on both coasts, and his influence has been strong.

His works are part of the permanent collection of the Anthology Film Archives, where a selection will be shown on March 12 at 7:00 p.m. In addition, Film Forum has scheduled a Bruce Baillie retrospective to be shown over the next two weekends. His work should be seen. Those who know it will want to reacquaint themselves, and those who have never seen a Bruce Baillie film will discover a major American film poet. ●

Volpe

Continued from Page

man who is 82 years old are always pure and I l from this individual."

He insists that too mu is done for us. Too mu and "too much mass cu was," he says, enough, "less individu the 1960s. The so-calle terculture was another sameness. All the youn the same likes and dislik

Volpe has a passion of all kinds. He buy Royces and other ma conditions them himsel

This unusual artist-d affects long, shaggy h garb of the 1960s criticism of the counter he also wears three striped suits and has h combed when he hos one-man shows, two cently held at Ne Southport Museum Manhattan and the gallery situated in the section of Brooklyn.

Freedom is what he cerned about and tha always includes sea g of his paintings, becau least they are a true freedom.

Iverson

Continued from Page 2

people: one who le freedom in the 185 through the Undergrou

The novel uses a se inner monologue form language appropriate formation and spirit and still permitting an the narrative for the re ing upon biographies w personal interviews w the story recounts a feelings about herself and the work she felt c do. She led slaves thr vious trails of the

With two films, including SINGLE PARENT (1975) and THE SPIRITPOSSESSION OF ALEJANDRO MAMANI (1975) Bolivia
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"LOVE AND ANA
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WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

NEW AMERICAN FILMMAKERS SERIES

QUICK BILLY

MARCH 25-31

QUICK BILLY 1967-1970. One hour plus showing of the "rolls". Color, b&w.

"The essential experience of transformation, between Life and Death, death and birth, or rebirth. In four Reels, the first three adapted from the Bardo Thodol, The Tibetian Book of the Dead. The fourth reel in the form of a black and white one-r eler Western, summarizing the material of the first three reels, which are color and abstract.

The work incorporates a large body of material dreams, the daily recording roll by roll of that extraordinary period of the filmmakers' life, "the moment by moment confrontation with Reality",(Carl Jung, The Tibetian Book of the Dead). Each phase of the work was given its own time to develop, stretching over a period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years.

"The rolls", silent 3 minute rolls of films that came after the film itself, like atrifacts from the descending layers of an archeological dig....numbered 41, 43, 46, and 47. Aesthetically complete, thus included (rent free option) as part of the total work. Reel 4 conceived by Paul Tulley, Charlotte Todd, and myself, with Debby Porter, Bob Treadwell and Kiro Tulley. Music by John Adams, titles by Bob Ross.

The "rolls" took the form of a correspondence, or theatre, between their author and Stan Brakhage, in the winter of 1968-69 and were shown at the M.I.T. Film Society by Fred Camper shortly after that time, along with written correspondence by both filmmakers given in the program notes.

"And you're doing it ART (and'beyond art', if you like to put it prayerfully that way) all at once. I never saw a tighter knit bag of aesthetical tricks transcending their history-you got Baroque & its Coco balanced near perfectly..and you got the whole Netherlandishes and cups, including the entire Dutch kitchen, carrying yr absolutely specific yearning into some new realm of feeling (that I suppose'll someday be called American): and you got the clear sanse, throughout of pains taking care..the surest prayer an artist is enabled to make..and a blessing to all those enabled to see it-thank you."----Stan Brakhage, letter of February 2, 1969.

--The filmmaker, Bruce Baillie

THIS FILM WAS MADE WITH A GRANT FROM THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE

From: Irina Leimbacher <irinaleimbacher@earthlink.net>
Subject: **BAILLIE PRESS SCREENING RESCHEDULED**
Date: September 25, 2006 3:32:37 PM PDT
To: irina@sfcinematheque.org

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the press screening of Bruce Baillie's CANYON CINEMANEWS FILMS has been rescheduled for 10 am, Tues, Sept 26, at MoMA. If you would like to come, please go to Minna Street entrance, and please confirm with me if you can make it. Thanks, Irina

********** PRESS SCREENING ******
****

TUES, SEPT 26, 10:00 AM
MoMA, Wattis Theatre, enter on Minna Street

The Canyon CinemaNews Years
Bruce Baillie In Person, with Chick Callenbach

The lesser-known work of Bay Area filmmaker Bruce Baillie (*Castro Street*), co-founder of San Francisco Cinematheque and Canyon Cinema (then Canyon Cinematheque) is being screened at Cinematheque on Sunday, Oct 15. BRUCE BAILLIE, who now resides in Washington state, will be present in person and will engage in a post-screening discussion with CHICK CALLENBACH former editor of Film Quarterly and UC Berkeley professor, in whose backyard many of the first Canyon CinemaNews films were conceived and created.

The six films in this program were all made between 1961 and 1966, and together they present an eloquent and surprising portrait of San Francisco and Northern California in the early 1960s. In his remarkable first film, *On Sundays*, and the later *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, Baillie evokes San Francisco and its human and physical landscapes as no other filmmaker has done. Mournful rather than celebratory, revealing idiosyncratic details rather clichéd sites, Baillie's films include elliptical narrative elements and documentary portraits as they weave images and sounds into exquisite city sonatas. While spearheaded by Baillie himself, several of the shorter works - portraits of individuals, a school for the handicapped, a Native

American reservation, and a public gym, were made by the Canyon CinemaNews Unit. This loose group of filmmakers and friends together created a small but stunning body of work that remains as a poignant record of a very specific historical and geographical moment. It is a record and an approach toward film form that needs to be seen and heard again.

We will screen the films in this order:
On Sundays, Mr. Hayashi, Here I am, Termination, The Gymnasts, Mass for the Dakota Sioux
The press screening will last 75 minutes.

Please reply to this email if you can attend the press screening on Tuesday morning.

68 San Francisco Chronicle
Fri., Dec. 10, 1971

A Strange, Haunting 'Billy Jack' -QUICK BILLY-

By Thomas Albright

Last month, the Hansen-Fuller gallery inaugurated a cinema series called "The Artist as Filmmaker." Significantly, that title as been reversed to "The Filmmaker as Artist" for the series' second program, which is being presented at the gallery at 8 o'clock tonight and tomorrow evening.

It features a strange, complex, insidiously haunting and rarely-screened film epic called "Quick Billy" which was completed last year by Bay Region Filmmaker Bruce Baillie.

It is an extraordinary achievement in that area wherein film becomes separated from its traditional ties with theater and entertainment, to become a kind of visual counterpart of poetry and music.

FARCE

"Quick Billy" refers, in any literal way, only to the last section of the film, which is an outrageously farcical, Straw-Hat-Review style spoof on old silent movie westerns. The film as a whole is conceived as a kind of autobiographical psychic journey structured on the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

It is constructed in four parts, or movements, for Baillie works with time in an almost symphonic manner, albeit infused with poetic and mystical implications. You don't watch "Quick Billy" in any ordinary sense so much as you experience it the way you might a Mahler symphony, and then wait for comprehension to seep in.

BRUCE BAILLIE
Achievement

Greek tragedy, a purgation by ridiculousness and an awakening to the absurdity of appearances.

LIGHT

The first two parts are almost entirely abstract in character, filled with atmospheres of light and washes and sheets of color that veil, or briefly resolve, into fleeting, elusive, elemental images — of sea and sky, and moon, the nude torso of a girl, lions and others.

Baillie manipulates these visual effects so that they form a fluid movement of constantly changing fades and dissolves, intimately keyed to a curiously muffled sound-track of dully roaring waves, muted bird calls or howling wind, occasionally shading into the remote drone of an airplane engine or snatches of mumbled, tortured human speech.

As various themes recur, they proceed to grow, not through a normal, sense of development, but by a kind of sheer insistence that parallels the sounds of the tide. He sustains a mood of somber, morose, lyrical austerity that is sometimes ominous, sometimes calm as death, and is peculiarly erotic in its slow, regular, somnabulent rhythms. And he creates a time-space atmosphere that is at once intense and remoye, not so much like dreams as the manner in which dreams are recalled, setting up a sense of distance and then carrying the viewer to the other side.

IMAGES

Part three carries these abstract images and rhythms to climactic proportions, into which realistic film images gradually intrude and eventually take over.

The comatose sense of primal unconsciousness that characterizes the first two parts becomes a kind of drowsy state between sleep and wakefulness, or perhaps a post-death form of restlessness wherein reality looses definition and memory and acter of facts.

All this leaves a lot of loose ends looking for a resolution, and one would think that the final section of the film is the last place they might find it. Starring Baillie and a number of his friends it is a fractured flicker, sepia-tone mock western stringing together a series of fast-paced vignettes that center on outlandish activities of early Kansas homesteaders and bad-men. It ends with the subtitle "Ever Westward Eternal Rider."

This has to be the corniest parable of spiritual rebirth ever filmed, but coming as it does at the end of such a somber and intense build-up, it becomes like the deus-ex-machina of traditional

Feb. 14th

DRAMA

'Quick Billy'

Michael Goodwin

BRUCE BAILLIE'S long awaited feature, "Quick Billy"—a 3½ year project in the life of one of the Bay Area's finest film poets—highlights a special five-day premiere showcase of new works from local independent film-makers, opening Wednesday at the Surf Interplayers Cinema (Beach street near Hyde) which features the New and Old American Cinema in an ever expanding repertory of commercially-neglected films.

Baillie, who began film-making in 1961—the same year he founded Canyon Cinema—is best known for his short classics "Castro Street," "All My Life," "Still Life," "Valentin of the Sierras," and "Mr. Hayashi" and for three or four largely successful excursions into a longer format ("To Parsifal," "Mass" and "Quixote"). But it is "Quick Billy" that consumed all of Baillie's creative energies since its inception in 1967: it is "Quick Billy" that grew out of the reflections that produced the intensely mediative shorts "Tung," "Castro Street" and "Valentin," What is "Quick Billy," this "Horse Opera In Four Reels"?

"Quick Billy" is based on the "Bardo Thodol"—the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Although the film stands quite well on its own, its structure has been so strongly influenced by the form of the Bardo journey that it helps if you know a little about the book.

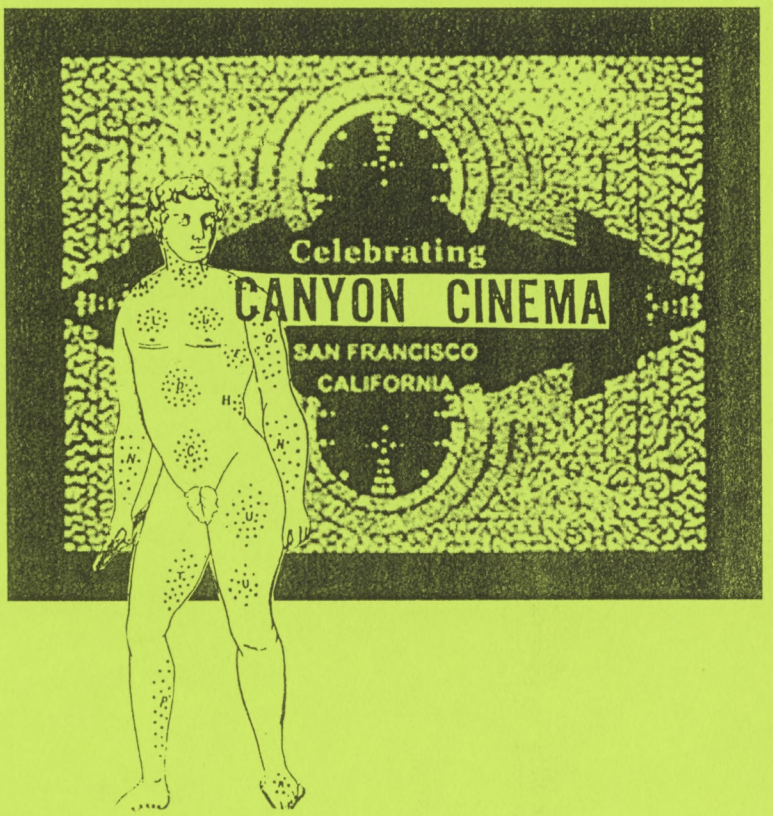
According to the teachings of Tantric Buddhism, when a man dies his (consciousness/beingness/Buddha nature) passes into the Bardo realm between death and rebirth—a place of fantastic visions, hallucinations, benevolent and wrathful deities. Once he's there, one of two things will happen to him: ei-

See Page 8

San Francisco Cinematheque

in association with **Canyon Cinema** present....

Curated by
Michelle Silva &
Dominic Angerame
$10 general; $6 members



Sunday, October 14 at 7:30pm
New Films from Canyon Cinema
Yerba Buena Center for the Art (701 Mission Street)

Tonight's program includes a sampling of new films recently placed into distribution with Canyon Cinema. All the works presented will be shown in 16mm or 35mm format to honor Canyon Cinema's devotion to promotion of the distribution and projection of motion picture film. Screening: ***Kosmos*** by Thorsten Fleisch, ***SSHTOORRTY*** by Michael Snow, ***Hot Leatherette*** by Robert Nelson, ***Bouquets 21-30*** by Rose Lowder, ***Orchard*** by Julie Murray, ***Startle Pattern*** by Eric Patrick, ***You Be Mother*** by Sarah Pucill, ***Errata*** by Alexander Stewart, ***Ber-Lin 99/00*** by Andre Lehmann.

Thursday, November 1 at 7:30pm
Roxie Cinema (3117 16th Street)
Dia de los Muertos: Honorar las almas de
Cineastas de avant-garde vanguarda
Bruce Baillie In Person

Bruce Baillie, founder of both Canyon Cinema and San Francisco Cinematheque, visits San Francisco to present two screenings honoring a selection of departed filmmakers who have given a piece of their souls to the noble cause of avant-garde cinema. Having known several of the filmmakers presented in tonight's show, Baillie will present his personal reminisces on these classic and forgotten films from Canyon Cinema's vaults. Screening: ***The Mexican Footage*** by Ron Rice; ***Heavy-Light*** by Adam Beckett; ***Bridges-Go-Round*** by Shirley Clarke; ***Aleph*** by Robert Fulton; ***Peyote Queen*** by Storm De Hirsch; Non ***Catholicam*** by Will Hindle; ***Glimpse of the Garden*** by Marie Menken; ***Occam's Thread*** by Stan Brakhage; ***Si See Sumi*** by Charles Levine; ***Sailboat*** by Joyce Weiland; ***Portrait Two, The Young Lady*** by Earl Bodien.

NOTE: **Bruce Baillie** will present **Dia de los Muertos, Honorar las almas de Cineastas de avant-garde vanguarda, part two** on Friday, November 2, at 7:30 pm, at the Ninth Street Independent Film Center.

Saturday, November 3 at 5pm
San Francisco Art Institute, Studio #26
Announcing the Annual (since 1961)
CANYON CINEMA REUNION & POTLUCK
Celebration 2007
Bruce Baillie In Person

Visiting Film Artist, **Bruce Baillie**, founder of Canyon Cinema and Honorary San Francisco Art Institute MFA, returns again this year to host the Annual Canyon Cinema Reunion & Potluck.This year a salute to the 40's, featuring the music of Les Brown & his band of Reknown (on tape) and other frivolities! Meet LaVonne, the world's first successful kitchen robot and other celebrities. Bring **REAL EATS!**

Sunday, November 11 at 7:30pm
Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (701 Mission Street)
Pioneers of Bay Area Filmmaking

Filmmaking in the Bay Area has an explosive history and has had a far lasting dynamic effect around the world. Explosive new forms of film have emerged from the Bay Area community over the years to reveal unheralded new visions of the medium and explorations into its aesthetic properties. This program presents a sampling of experimental cinema by artists in the Bay Area from the late 1940s and '50s. Screening: ***Horror Dream*** and ***Clinic of Stumble*** by Sidney Peterson, ***Things to Come*** and ***Obmaru*** by Patricia Marx, ***Four in the Afternoon*** by James Broughton, ***Notes on the Port of St. Francis*** by Frank Stauffacher, ***Divertissement Rococo*** and ***Eneri*** by Hy Hirsch, ***In Between*** by Stan Brakhage, ***Logos*** and ***Odds and Ends*** by Jane Conger, and ***Beat*** by Christopher Maclaine

NEW AMERICAN FILMMAKERS
WHITNEY MUSEUM FILM PROGRAM

BRUCE BAILLIE 1976

Jonas Mekas has said, "In my filmmakers' Pantheon, Bruce Baillie takes a shining place. His work I can see again and again." Baillie's films are lyrical articulations of light, movement, color and mythopoeic imagery.

There is in Bruce Baillie something that reminds us of the wide country, of the spaces of America . . . I remember Baillie for certain images that keep reappearing in my mind. Curiously enough, those images have always to do with travel, with cross-country rides, with wide spaces, with the huge American continent being crossed . . .

In the images of his films, he seems to be very stable and very sure and always going after some definite and, probably always, the same image. With each film one feels he maybe found it. But no, the image, the dream is not yet caught, still somewhere else—so he makes another film, trying to come closer to it, from some other angle.

Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal*

VALENTIN DE LAS SIERRAS

Music: Old Mexican song by José Santollo Nasido en Santa Crus de la Soledad, with Manuel Sasa Zamora and Family.

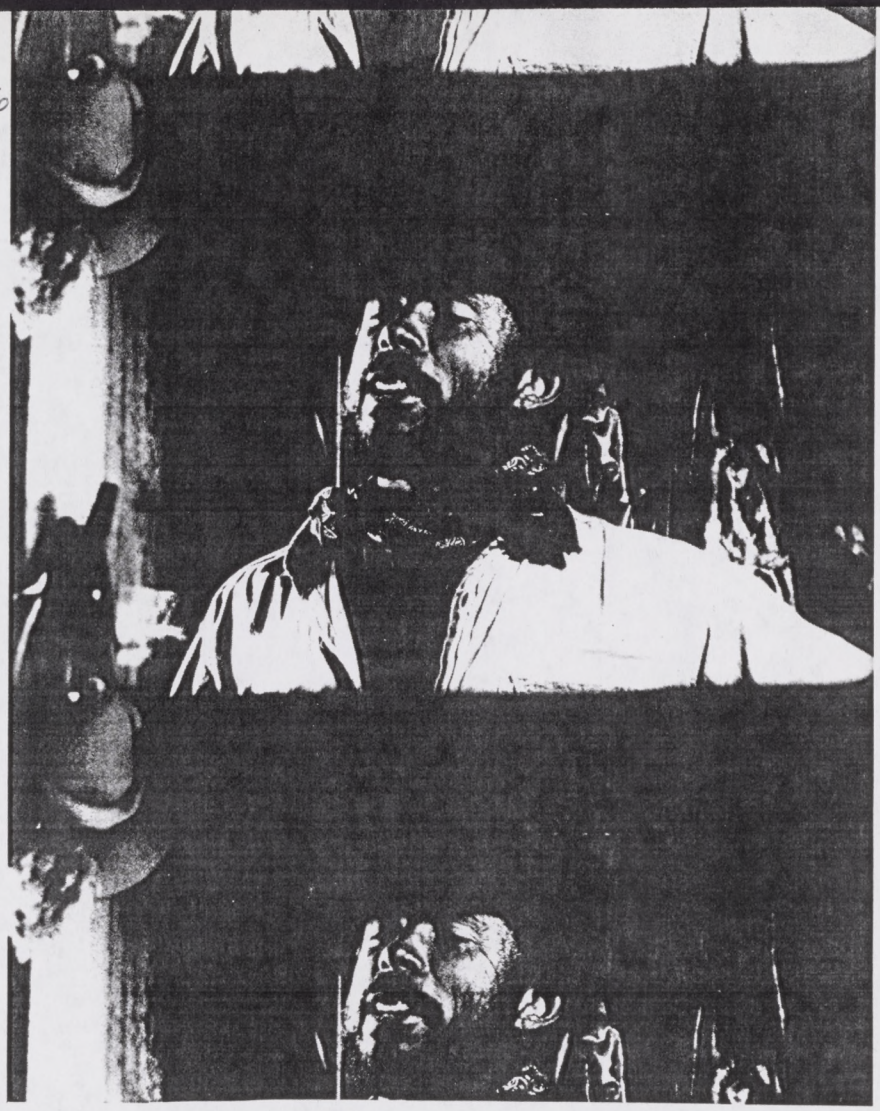
1967 color 10 minutes
rental: $15.00 sales: $250.00

Skin, eyes, knees, horses, hair, sun, earth. Old song of Mexican hero, Valentin, sung by blind José Santollo Nasido en Santa Cruz de la Soledad.

Bruce Baillie

The film is a very exactly and meticulously structured collage. Yet what results is a complete suspension of whatever ideas we may bring to the film about guitars, people or Mexico; because each of these things is made a part of the smooth meditative flow of the film; and it is a great tribute to Baillie's art that they can be seen as nothing else.

Fred Camper, M.I.T. Film Society



QUICK BILLY

Reel IV by and with Paul Tulley, Charlotte Todd and Baillie; Music: John Adams; Partly supported by grants from AFI and Guggenheim Foundation.

1971 60 minutes
color and black & white
rental: $75.00 sales: $600.00

(Included at no additional rental charge, if requested, six uncut camera rolls to be shown before or following QUICK BILLY. Numbered 14, 41, 43, 46, 47 and 52 totaling 16 minutes, color, silent, 24 fps, these are uncut archival material.)

The essential experience of *transformation* between life and death, death and birth, or rebirth in four reels: the first three adapted from the Bardo Thodol, The Tibetan Book of the Dead; the fourth reel in the form of a black and white one-reeler Western, summarizing the material of the first three reels, which are color and abstract.

The work incorporates a large body of material: dreams, the daily recording roll-by-roll of that extraordinary period of the film-maker's life, "the moment-by-moment confrontation with Reality" (Carl Jung, THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD). Each phase of the work was given its own *time* to develop, stretching over a period of 3½ years.

"The Rolls," silent 3-minute rolls of films that came after the film itself, like artifacts from the descending layers of an archaelogical dig . . .

Bruce Baillie

The whole first three reels of QUICK BILLY hover on the edge of consciousness, mixing, blurring and masking images so that they are rarely definable, even though within its own range of textures the film proceeds from the abstract to the relatively concrete and specific before leaping into the ironic narrative of the fourth reel.

P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*

In QUICK BILLY, at the end of the film, we see Bruce Baillie himself riding off into the unknown—the eternal rider, superimposed upon the map of the United States . . .

The form of the film itself may have something to do with the eternal search of Baillie, the feeling of all the lost travelers of the world, of attaching oneself and going again . . . and when its all over, he sort of opens the very end of the film and permits it to spill out into the open again, he never closes the form completely. Paradoxically, this way he may have achieved the most complete and most satisfactory film, which, through the mysterious openness, permits us to project into it so many incomplete parts of ourselves.

Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal*

my early material—and
take about forty thou-
of money. Money—or
ll our works eventually

Bruce Baillie

A critical Cinema 2 by Scott MacDonald
Univ. of Calif Press, 1992

In the world of film studies, one often senses a suspicion of beautiful imagery, a suspicion based on the assumption that the apparatus of the movie camera is so constructed that it produces beautiful images almost automatically. Bruce Baillie's films are full of beautiful imagery, but they are anything but "eye candy." For Baillie, the filmstrip is a space where the physical world around him and the spiritual world within him can intersect; the screening room is a place where cinema devotees can share moments of illumination. The remarkable textures and colors of Baillie's films are not the products of a movie camera doing what it does automatically; they are achieved by means of homespun technologies Baillie devises to modify the camera so that it can be true to what his inner vision reveals to him, rather than to conventional visual and narrative expectations.

In his earliest films Baillie explored ways of visualizing his own mental states and of capturing something of the lovely simplicity of the people around him he saw as most deeply spiritual. Increasingly, his films became characterized by a tendency to layer or combine multiple images and by an unusual sensitivity to texture, color, and light. Each of these tendencies can be understood as an emblem of a particular understanding Baillie had developed. The layering and combining of imagery—most memorable, perhaps, in *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964), *Tung* (1966), and *Castro Street* (1966)—became a way of expressing the complexity of experience, the discovery that reality is not simply a set of surfaces available to perception and intelligence, but a composite of surface and of spirit that flows beneath the surface and behind our perception of it. Baillie's dexter-

ity in capturing the sensuous textures of the world—particularly notable in *Valentin de las Sierras* (1968), *Quick Billy* (1970), and the recent video *The P-38 Pilot* (1990)—is an emblem of the degree to which he sees the perceivable world as invigorated by spirit. And his fascination with color and light in such films as *Still Life* (1966), *Quick Billy,* and *Roslyn Romance* (1977) is a function of his desire for spiritual enlightenment; it connects his work with that of such predecessors and contemporaries as Oskar Fischinger, Jordan Belson, James Whitney, Stan Brakhage, and Tom Chomont, who have used film as a way of visualizing the colors of the soul on its journey toward spiritual regeneration.

For Baillie, the very idea of making his films is so out of synch with the mainstream history of film and the commoditized world it reflects and reconfirms that it renders him an anomaly, an outcast, a "pure fool" like Parsifal and Don Quixote. Indeed, modern society is encoded in the very tools a filmmaker must work with. Achieving the spiritual by means of filmmaking—a mechanical/chemical process—simply "can't be done," and *therefore* is worth doing as a means of demonstrating the ability of film artists to transcend their means. In *To Parsifal* [1963], *Mass for the Dakota Sioux,* and *Quixote* [1965] Baillie becomes the spiritual knight-errant not only in terms of what he trains his camera on and how he uses it but by being willing to enter the field and make films at all.

His refusal to betray his cine-spiritual quest, despite the resistance that surrounded him, became a demonstration of the spiritual integrity of his work. Throughout the sixties, Baillie functioned as both film artist and as organizer. He was the catalyst for the Canyon Cinema exhibition programs that finally resulted in Canyon Cinema distribution, now (along with the Museum of Modern Art's Circulating Film Program) the most successful American distributor of a wide range of critical forms of cinema.

I spoke with Baillie in June 1989 at his home on Camano Island in Washington State.

MacDonald: How did you get started?

Baillie: What led me toward making films in the beginning, in 1960 or even a little before, was an interest in theater and the need to function in the world through art. When I was a kid, in sixth or seventh grade in Aberdeen, South Dakota, we messed up one time and the principal's punishment was that we had to give a play for an assembly. At first, we thought this was a severe penalty, but pretty soon we liked the idea.

Later, we asked him
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MacDonald: This i

Baillie: 1958 or 19
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Bruce ~~Baillie~~ — Bridget Irish

An Occasional Column on Film: Bruce Baillie's QUICK BILLY
by Michael Reynolds reprinted from The Berkeley Barb, March 21-27, 1975

Sometime around 1967 Bruce Baillie found himself locked in a near-fatal dance with hepatitis. Having shared in same dance the space is not unfamiliar to me. He began, atthis time a film/sound composition he was to work on for more than three years.

The completed film was titled QUICK BILLY, an hour long summoning of the principles of transformation and divided into four separate reels. The film is a masterpiece of mystical vision. Though it is five years old, it appears as timeless as work by Blake or Brakhage.

With multiple impositionsof sea, moon, sun, earth, animal, human floating and swirling across, up and down the screen, Baillie penetrates the surface of perception and transforms the particular into the universal, vast, ceaselessly in motion. The transfiguration of light in this film prefaces Stan Brakhage's most recent work, THE TEXT OF LIGHT.

While both filmmakers seem to be concerned with seeing through particular phenomenon to the unifying essence beneath their objective reality, that is with film, Light, Baillie maintains a symbolic usage to correspond with the mind's state. Brakhage seeks to remove "self" content allowing for the unspecified leaving perceptual information in the minds of the audience.

Where three reels of QUICK BILLY are made up with this cascade of earth, air, fire, water and flesh stemming from Baillie's study of the Bardo Thodol, The Tibetian Book Of The Dead, the fourth is a sleight-of-hand parody of the Cowboy Movie done in monochrome, D.W. Griffith/Murnau style of arch silent filmmaking complete with cacophoncus old-timey fiddle and banjo music.

Baillie plays Quick Billy, a raunchy rapist of a Kansas cowboy. It's a raw theatricality that counterpoints, slaps across the pristine mystical visions of the other reels, leaving the image of "Quick Billy" as a metaphor of human-as-animal loose upon the earth.

The Rolls which accompany the film began as correspondence between Baillie and Brakhage during the construction of QUICK BILLY. Baillie has described them as "artifacts from the descending layers of an archeological dig". They are silent, three-minute rolls, some of which were made in 1968-69.

Two additional rolls have been added since the film was first shown in 1970 and Baillie moved from the sea ranch near Fort Bragg to the East Coast They are like vestiges from the period of making QUICK BILLY, recurrences of visions from that mind-state.

Baillie's film was shown this week at Canyon Cinematheque, which he founded in 1961. Perhaps the Pacific Film Archive or the San Francisco Museum could mount a complete retrospective of Baillie's work.

The groundwork for much being done in independent film today, was laid by Baillie's films. Like Brakhage, he is a transition figure between filmmaking in the Sixties and current work.

The Films of J.J. Murphy by Michael Reynolds, Berkeley Barb, April 11-17

In February, J.J. Murphy trekked west from his home in New Jersey to premiere his films for San Francisco at the Canyon Cinematheque. At that time his work was known to only a few in this area; since then he has shown his work at Millenium in New York and will have a screening this Monday, the 14th, at the Pacific Film Archive.

Murphy, a painter whose film work dates back only four years, is one of the best independent filmmakers in America. Even though as of this

San Francisco Cinematheque
announces its new 1994 Program Note Booklet and Bruce Baillie Monograph

Our **1994 Program Note Booklet** features works by:

- **Peggy Ahwesh**
- **Martin Arnold**
- **Stan Brakhage**
- **Joseph Cornell**
- **Harun Farocki**
- **Nina Fonoroff**
- **Robert Frank**
- **Derek Jarman**
- **Lynn Kirby**
- **George Kuchar**
- **Paula Levine**
- **Kurt Kren**
- **Victor Masayesva jr.**
- **Matthias Müller**
- **Ngozi Onwurah**
- **Luther Price**
- **Anne Robertson**
- **Jay Rosenblatt**
- **Richard Serra**
- **Jeffrey Skoller**
- **Phil Solomon**
- **Andy Warhol**
- **and hundreds more!**

The San Francisco Cinematheque announces the publication of its **1994 Program Note Booklet**, containing the collected program notes from the Cinematheque's 1994 film and video exhibition season. This reference guide documents 65 programs, featuring over 300 individual film, video, and performance works by more than 200 artists. The notes include critical essays, filmographies, and information about works ranging from turn of the century films to the newest contemporary experimental films, videos and installation pieces.

Highlights from the 1994 season featured in this booklet include retrospectives of films by **Marjorie Keller**, **Nina Fonoroff**, **Manuel De Landa**, **Jack Walsh**, **Lynn Hershman** and **Andy Warhol**; the installations of **Articulated Silences**; in-person presentations and guest curated programs by **Arthur and Corinne Cantrill**, **Lynne Sachs**, **Craig Baldwin**, and **Mark McElhatten**; thematic programs like **Korean Visions: New Cinema** and **Odun de Odun de: The African Spirit in Contemporary Film and Video**, plus many other exciting events. The booklet is assembled in chronological order and includes both a title and maker index.

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TIM WILKINS P1

REMEMBERING CANYON + CINEMATHEQUE ORIGINS:

BRUCE BAILLIE BACK IN THE BAY — APRIL 17-23

For the first time in over ten years, film and videomaker Bruce Baillie is back in the Bay Area to show his work. As well as being a seminal voice in lyrical, experimental filmmaking, Baillie holds a special place at the heart of Bay Area film exhibition as the founder(along with Chick Strand) of Canyon Cinematheque, which was born in 1960 on a sheet in Baillie's backyard in Canyon, California. The eclectic screenings of films then continued in an anarchist restaurant in Berkeley, a private girls' school, the Coffee Gallery in San Francisco, Strand's house, and a variety of other odd and sundry places. The often tri-weekly screenings were enlivened by wine, popcorn, pillows, chairs borrowed from a nearby mortuary, and Strand and Baillie in costume collecting $1 donations (or IOUs) and raffling off Baillie's homebaked pies in the intermission. These screenings subsequently led to the creation of a filmmaking worshop, the publication of *Canyon Cinemanews* (with Ernest Callenbach), the expansion of Canyon into an important internationally recognized distributor of alternative film, and ultimately also the founding of San Francisco Cinematheque which, as the exhibition component, split off from the rest of Canyon in the late 70s.

In addition to three screenings of Baillie's work at the Cinematheque on April 17, 20, and 21, and open discussions on the mornings of April 20-22 at TOTAL MOBILE HOME microCINEMA, all are invited to the **Canyon Cinema Reunion and Potluck** in Baillie's honor. Come with a little food and a lot of spirit to **Fort Mason Park, Saturday April 22, noon onwards**. In case of more endless rain, we'll relocate to the San Francisco Art Institute Cafeteria.

TIM WILKINS p2

SIMPLE BEAUTIES: THE ART AND LIFE OF BRUCE BAILLIE
Bruce Baillie in person.

"I have just uncovered a term for the way I plan to exist, and continue working: 'Home Movies.' Some of us around the country will be creating for a time, perhaps the duration of our lives, home movies. Forced back to the most bare limitations of life and work one can still walk familiar streets, stand at the back door to watch the changes of sun."
(Bruce Baillie, Nov. 23, 1962, San Francisco)

Canyon Cinema founder (1961) Bruce Baillie has remained true to his art, life and vision of community for over 30 years. A profoundly spiritual man, Baillie seeks beauty in simple, honest moments and truths behind calcified habits. The films he has made are cherished throughout the world for their sensual lyricism and social critique, and in the last several years he has expanded his artmaking to radio, video, and literature. The Cinematheque proudly presents a week of Bruce Baillie events--his first public presentations in San Francisco since 1983--as a welcome antidote to this stuffy, fearful, conservative time, and as a reminder of our City's gloriously human past. Each evening Baillie will show films, video tapes, play selections from his radio series *Dr. Bish's Remedies* and read from his fictional autobiography *Memoirs Of An Angel*.

April 17 - San Francisco Art Institute Monday 7:30 PM
Films: *Mass For The Dakota Sioux* (1963-64), *All My Life* (1966), *Castro Street* (1966), *Valentin De Las Sierras* (1966) and others.
Co-sponsored by S.F.A.I.'s Art Of Now lecture series.

April 20 - Center For The Arts, Thursday, 7:30 PM
Still Life (1966), *Tung* (1966), *Quixote* (1964-1965), *Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)*(1974) and others.

April 21 - San Francisco Art Institute, Friday, 8:30 PM
Quick Billy (1967-70) and Camera Rolls (1968-69)

PLUS - FREE on Wednesday - Saturday mornings (April 19-22), at 10:00 AM, in Total Mobile Home's Screening Room 51 McCoppin St., Bruce Baillie invites everyone to discuss Canyon's early history with him, see films, videos, and more!

Cinemathequ

Tim Wilkins p3

P R E S S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Joel Shepard
(415) 558-8129

SIMPLE BEAUTIES: THE ART AND LIFE OF BRUCE BAILLIE

Featuring BRUCE BAILLIE in Person

The San Francisco Cinematheque and San Francisco Art Institute are proud to announce legendary artist/filmmaker Bruce Baillie's first public appearances in the Bay Area since 1983. Baillie will present three evenings of nearly all his completed films, read selections from his fictional autobiography, *Memoirs of an Angel* , play highlights from his radio series *Dr. Bish's Remedies*,, as well as reminisce and tell stories from the early days of Canyon Cinema.

Canyon Cinematheque founder (1960) Bruce Baillie has remained true to his art, life and vision of community for over 30 years. A profoundly spiritual man, Baillie seeks beauty in simple, honest moments and truths behind calcified habits. The films he has made are cherished throughout the world for their sensual lyricism and social critique (*Castro Street* was on the A.F.I.'s first list of Landmark American Films to be preserved).

Join S.F. Cinematheque and SFAI in a week-long celebration, honoring the return of this American original.

April 17-San Francisco Art Institute Monday 7.30pm
Films: *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1963-64), *All My Life* (1966), *Castro Street* (1966) *Valentin De Las Sierras* (1966), *The P-38 Pilot* (1990,video) and others
Co-sponsored by SFAI's lecture series.

April 20-Center For The Arts Thursday 7.30pm
Films: *Still Life* (1966), *Tung* (1966), *Quixote* (1964-65), *Rosalyn Romance (Is It Really True?)* (1974) and others.

April 21-San Francisco Art Institute Friday 8.30pm
Films: *Quick Billy* (1967-70), and Camera Rolls (1968-69)

PLUS- FREE on Thursday-Saturday mornings (April 20-22), 10 AM, at Total Mobile Home (51 McCoppin St.), Bruce Baillie invites everyone to discuss Canyon's early history with him: hear tapes, see videos and more.

AND-All are invited to the Canyon Cinema Reunion and Potluck in Baillie's honor.
Fort Mason Park, Saturday Aprill 22 12 noon.

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won't have final copy til Thurs.

BRUCE BAILLIE: PROGRAM 1
BRUCE BAILLIE IN PERSON
Monday, April 17, 1995

"In my filmmakers' pantheon, Bruce Baillie takes a shining place. His work I can see again and again. There is in Bruce Baillie something that remind us of the wide country, of the spaces of America ... I remember Baillie for certain images that keep reappearing in my mind. Curiously enough, those images have always to do with travel, with cross country rides, with wide spaces, with the uge American continent being crossed ... In the images of his films, he seems to be very stable and very sure and always going after some definite, and probably always, the same image. With each film one feels maybe he found it. But no, the image of the dream is not yet caught, still somewhere else — so he makes another film, trying to come closer to it, from some other angle.""

— Jonas Mekas, Movie Journal

Mr. Hayashi (1961); 16mm, b&w, sound, 3 minutes

"[*Mr.Hayashi*] was made as a newsreel advertisement to be shown at Baillie's film society, Canyon Cinema, in the second year of its existence. It shoes a Japanese gardener, Mr. Hayashi, performing his daily tasks in a few black and white shots. The form is intentionally brief, minor, and occasional; although there is no metaphor or conflict of images, it reminds one of the aspiration first voiced by Maya Deren and later echoed by Brakhage to create a cinematic haiku."

— P. Adams Sitney,
Montreux Exhibition Catalog, 1974

To Parsifal (1963); 16mm, color, sound, 16 minutes

"You're given a certian responsibility and a gift or grace, a certain unique capability, which can turn against you if it's not attended to properly. Even the king who possessed this emblem of purity or perfection, this divine weapon, was heir to temptation, and the weapon fell into the hands of his nemesis. The wound was ultimately mortal, Though he was still alive, still functioning, he was incapable of carrying on this essential divine mission to celebrate Universal Truth, embodied in the Holy Grail, so it was foretold that there would be a successor who would come along, a "pure fool" as Wagner called him — whether the original name was Parsifal or Percivil, it really meant "pure fool." ... Parsifal was object and subject all at once, an objectified depiction *and* a reflection of my subjective pursuit of an identity, my recognition of myself. To try to make *my* own films against enormous resistance was perhaps Parsifal-ian: to be out there in the woods and on the ocean with a movie camera, unemployed, not doing the usual things — marrying, making children, setting up the pension plan, carrying the mail."

— Bruce Baillie, in *A Critical Cinema 2*
by Scott MacDonald

Mass For the Dakota Sioux (1963-4); 16mm, b&w, sound, 24 minutes

"A film Mass, dedicated to that which is vigorous, intelligent, lovely, the-best-in-man; that which work suggests is nearly dead.
Brief guide to the structure of the film:
Introit: A long, lightly exposed section composed in the camera.

Kyrie: A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge accompanied by the sound of the Gregorian Chant. The *epistle* is in several sections. In this central part, the film becomes gradually more outrageous, the material being either television or the movies, photographed directly from the screen. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout the *epistle*.
Gloria: The sound of a siren and a short sequence with a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel.
The final section of the *communion* begins with the *offertory* in a procession of lights and figures in the second chant.
The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The touring car arrives, with the celebrants; the body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isoloated people accompanied by the final chant."

— Bruce Baillie

All My Life (1966); 16mm, color, sound, 3 minutes
"... it was the quality of the light for three summer days in Casper, California, up the coast where Tulley lived. It looked like Cork, Ireland, used to.... It was inspired by the light (every day is unique as you know), and by the early Teddy Wilson/Ella Fitzgerald recoeding, which was always playing in Tulley's little cabin, with its condemnation sign on it."

—Bruce Baillie in *A Critical Cinema* by Scott Mac Donald

Castro Street (1966); 16mm, b&w/color, sound, 10 minutes
"I liked the assignment in form that I gave myself. To use a street as a basic form rather than a narrative or any kind of storyline. And so I really did start the film out at the beginning of the street, and ended it on the red barn at the end. Then, in terms of discovering an idea, it came right in the middle of a severe period of my life, where I felt I was being born actually. Or becoming conscious is the way I put it at the time. And the whole film is the shape of being born or becoming conscious."

— Bruce Baillie, *Film Culture*, 1969

Valentin de las Sierras (1968); 16mm, color, sound, 10 minutes
"One of Baillie's very greatest works. The location: a Mexican village. Baillie's description: "Skin, eyes, knees, horses, hair, sun earth." The camera concentrates on individual details, but there are none of the abstracting techniques of *Castro Street*. The images are hard and clear, the cuts sharp and abrupt in both image and sound., More strongly than in any other Baillie film, this work puts the viewer in a state which is very difficult to explain or account for in terms of the specifics of the film."

Audio-Brandon Catalog, 1978-79

The P-38 Pilot (1990); VHS, color, sound, 15 minutes
"A work from the darkness of winter, a kind of pre-*Paradiso* which parallels by chance, Dante's *Purgatorio* — my own confessions and clues to ascent, life and Light.
Abstract imagery from my home, winter rain, WW II paraphenalia, etc., along with an audio monologue recorded years ago and carried back and forth across the country, living out of my VW. Made with simple home equipment no budget, 6 - 7 months time and toil.
As all art is made from some particular sort of sticks and stones, this piece happens to be formed from the words of a war hero who suffers his own particular

"habitante", as this P-38 pilot would have it. The (film) is not, however a documentary about — in this case — alcoholism.
Note from the conclusion: "Te lucis ante terminum" (Thy Light before the end — or, before the darkness), taken from the traditional *Compline* service at the end of the day, sung by Christian religious through the centuries. The image of beloved (my family) at the very end of the work is the final, perhaps essential clue, given also of course by Dante Aligheri in his 14th century classic, by way of Beatrice: i.e., the way beyond inevitable suffering, transcending individual intellect, is only through (pure) love and loving."

— Bruce Baillie, Camano Island, WA

• *program notes compiled and written by Brian Frye*•

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SIMPLE BEAUTIES: THE ART AND LIFE OF BRUCE BAILLIE
Program 2
Bruce Baillie In Person

Thursday, April 20, 1995

Still Life (1966); 16mm, color, sound, 2 minutes

"I was only ever interested in making openings, not closings." — Bruce Baillie

Tung (1966); 16mm, color and b/w, silent, 5 minutes

"Portrait of a friend named Tung, deriving directly from a momentary image on waking. Seeing her bright shadow I thought she was someone I you we had known." — Bruce Baillie

Quixote (1964-1965); 16mm, color and b/w, sound, 45 minutes

In *Quixote* Baillie uses the techniques of underground film to explore the inflections of a personal vision with a subtlety and precision equaled only by the work of his film correspondent, Stan Brakhage, but his explicitly political inflection of those techniques was radically innovative. His orchestration of a film vocabulary in which sensuous attention to minute local textures is combined with an overall rhythmic sweep, and his use of this method to register the world of public affairs, is on the one hand testament to the flexibility and resourcefulness of that underground cinema, its providing the individual with access to the arena of social commentary. It also marks, on the other hand, a limit noticeable initially in the very virtues of the "poetic" method, for the obverse of its subtlety and indirection is its inability to speak explicitly about the role of Hollywood, of Wall Street, of Vietnam ... The significance of Baillie's style is thus double: it is a means of marshaling images to articulate a critique of a social degeneration, and its own formal properties represent values alternative to that degradation. The precision of his perception, the subtle analytic cues of his rhythms, and the virtuoso orchestration of an extended register of sensual tonalities of film not only stand *against* the commercial film and television and their political complicity, but also stand *with* the counterculture and its representative, here the American Indian. The aesthetic qualities of *Quixote* thus allegorize social values, mythic richness, ecological sensitivity, even technological primitiveness; its aesthetic is completely a politics and vice versa. Its method is that of the poet—of associational implications, of connotation, of the play of significance, sensitivity, and seriousness ... 'a cinema which ... has been liberated by poetry'.

— From Allegories of Cinema
by David E. James

"Climaxing the filmmaker's first period of work, *Quixote* is a king of summary and conclusion of a number of themes, etc., especially that of the hero ... depicting Western orientation as essentially one of conquest. The film is conceived in a number of different styles and on a number of simultaneous levels." — Bruce Baillie

Cinema News # 78-3+4 (1978)

Stan Brakhage and Malcolm LeGrice Debate

In December of 1977 Malcolm LeGrice and Stan Brakhage met in Boulder to publicly debate the issue "Structural versus Personal Filmmaking." The event was organized by Virgil Grillo and Don Yannacito of the Rocky Mountain Film Center. Both filmmakers showed a selection of films prior to the debate. What follows is the entire transcription of the evening's activity. During the discussion reference is made to LeGrice's book, ABSTRACT FILM AND BEYOND, available from M.I.T. press.

Introductory Remarks

STAN BRAKHAGE: I'm very happy to begin with this film. It sort of fell out that we begin with this film, **VALENTIN DE LAS SIERRAS** of Bruce Baillie's because it so exemplifies some of the things I particularly want to speak for this evening. First of all, that it doesn't look at all like an Avant-Garde, Experimental, or even Art movie. Even in the specialized sense of art movies that those desperately courageous people are trying to take away from the pornographers and the documenterists of painters painting. But it does speak, to me at least, from the beginning in the language of film without feeling the need to speak for itself as film, if you know what I mean - and that it existsverysimply on many different levels of meaning. That is, it can be followed through by its shifting changes of colors as a melody - that is colors recur and return in a pattern that is very kin to being melodic. Though it doesn't at all do so in a way that would be any imitation of music. That is, it does so in a kind of searching, struggling, moving, shifting, changing formal way. Along the line of the different shapes that this color inhabits throughout the film. Those are created not by some obviously superimposed color, but just very much as he was able to lift that light and those colors thereby off the creatures and the plants, the animals, vegetables and minerals that he's photographing-and that it suggests so many things about this village he was living in. I just think of one shot for example: where you have the horse's mane on one side of the image and you have rope on the other, a twist of that. You have an extremely out of focus bar of the same coloration as the wheat in the field coming in the near foreground of that image and all of these things, though they have different rhythms within that shot, are in a relationship to each other - by composition,andthen as the mind is moved one step further by their actual physical relationship to each other. And so goes this weave of Bruce Baillie's throughout the entire film. I think the bluntist example of his reaching into anything experimental or left field in order to bring out a quality that he had seen and wishes to have the film contain is the superimposition of the ancient statue over the little girl's face - and almost by its being there it demonstrates the subtletly of the rest of the film in leaving the viewer free and in being, in the first place, a film which simply presents through the concern of the film maker-the artistry of itself as a final film. You know what bothers me so much and what's caused me to speak out finally against "structuralism" as an aesthetic and against many films that don't come under that banner, is what I would call a selfconsciousness as I encountered it in a persoo and an extremely public self-consciousness. It started really in the history of film at the very beginning because we have a medium that nobody understands what its life is to be. But when it comes to the point that whole films are made primarily about their own coming into existence and being existing and that's the primary level in which the film is speaking - that seemstome as boring almost immediately as those people who are always speaking about their own coming into existence and being existing. And in addition to that - Imeanwhatissoremarkableabout Baillie'sfilm is that it can, indeed, be seen in that fashion. I think all of you who experienced it as more than just another documentary - ifyoucanrerunthoseimagesin your mind, you can perhaps sense what can easily be proven maybe some other time. This whole film can be run absolutely out of focus and it will hold up out of focus as a purely moving visual. Just the rhythms of these shapes and the shifting tones and colors of them and their movements in relationship to each other will hold up as an absolutely abstract experience and in fact, indeed, just a set up where people were requested to look at the projector beam going overhead and watching the rhythms of the shifting changes of these tones and the shape of that beam would also have anintegral aesthetic experience. That is, one with integrity. So that that possibility exists also within this film without that becoming the primary or indeed the only focus of the film. It can, as well as carrying that, it can also carry symbol in a very subtle and charming way. The children passing through that deck of cards and that they do just naturally seem to, or he did certainly, just naturally catch that pause and that special attention that they give to the sun and to that spot of color of the sun not only just as symbol but as that possibility and that part of the frame has been retained there for that full blossoming of that circle of red - along the line of the introduction of what looked to me like poinsettias and what begins as a red spot, several images back. So that, again, even symbolism and myth to this extent - he suggests it, and a variety of consciousness of something of these people's lives - and an integrity to film as filmasfilm can exist consonant and not be seperated from each other. So it seems to me a film with many arms, many strings that can be played upon, that reaches out to a world in a way which films that concentrate upon film-making do not seem to me to do. I guess thats about all I have to say as an opening statement.

MALCOLM LE GRICE: I think that one of the problems that I feel about the way that this discussion is set up is that it seems as if my function is in some way to defend "structuralism" - and really I don't think that I feel I should be here to do that. Neither do I think I should be here to attack what Stan calls personal cinema. My interest in this discussion between myself and Stan and hopefully between other people in the audience is to see if we can come to some further clarification about what the categeries of activity are. Now I have on a couple of occasions publicly, also, attacked the use of the term "structuralism" for the kind of work that is going on. It is not a term which I've ever been happy with. Where Sitney first used it, it seemed to me it was very confusing and very loosely used. I never saw the relationshp between what Sitney call "structuralism" and those things which seem to have gone in the name of "structuralism" in other fields. The things that came out of Levi-Strauss, and people like Roland Barthes and so on. I always found it extremely difficult to make some link between that work and work in cimema. And so when I tried to analyze what went on in the period which I think starts in about 1966 when there is clearly some shift in the underlying concept of cinematic practice, I tended first of all to just say it was a broad formal development. A broad concern with form- and then in one article in '72 and also in my book I tried to give a broad kind of - not exactly categorization, but a set of what seemed to me to be the various concerns of that development, not as categories of work, but as a series of definable concerns within the work, which any one work may have more than one of. So it wasn't so much categories as what you might call a set of parameters of concern and interest. On top of which I've also considered a number of the more mechanistic interpretations of the formal development in cinema to be a misunderstanding of the potentialities of concerning oneself with the cinematic language at the same time as one is functioning with the language. And one of the main areas which I've tended to oppose quite strongly is the area which has, in a sense, replaced either narrative or, as it were, the existential, personal, coordinator, behind the camera and behind the editing, by the use of some kind of mechanistic system. I think a large part of what I see going on with art schools, under the sort of guise of "structuralism" is for me a very easy route towards a structural concept, which is the use of some sort of definable mechanistic system, either by which to shoot a film-like taking a number of frames as a basis for a system, or by, after shooting, editing a film. And this broad direction which I think is the thing most identified with "structuralism" is I'm sure equally uninteresting to me as it is to Stan. I don't want to speak for Stan. We should almost get him back here now to start the discussion on that. The other thing is: the question of form. There is a lot of confusion, again, about form. One has to go back to Sitney for this. Form as some kind of unification of the whole. I'm not really happy with that concept either. What I have been proposing almost as an alternative to talking about structure in film - one of the reasons for opposing the notion of structure is its tendency to move towards a kind of a static, skeletal concept - the concept of a skeleton. both form and system tending to function as a skeleton within the film around which content is sort of attached. The concept which I've tended to move towards is one of process and procedure which seems to recommend itself because of the dynamic implications of that - and allowing the concept of, if we want to go back to structure, to be seen as one which permits a dynamic shift during its construction. Which leads to another kind of split in the concept of process, which I feel that I need to make theoretically, and that is the concept of process as the processes of the filmmaking strategy. That is process from the point of view of filmmaking. But then there's the whole set of questions which I think are extremely significant and thats the processes of film viewing - the processes bywhichafilm image is read, a film structure is read, I am talking about the audience's viewing of the film, but in a sense, the film maker is also audience. It seems to me there are two sets of interconnected questions of process which emerge. The processes by which a film is constructed—and process can lead to questions of strategy and various kinds of predetermined devices, and so on and so forth, and the processes of viewing, which means that we have to consider and investigate the structures by which human beings develop their concepts of meaning, develop their concepts of reality, and so forth. I think that I could go on a lot longer with this because each of these questions leads to another question. Just from the point of view of the timing of the whole thing I think that we can take this up further in the second part of the evening.

STAN: I'd like to ask a question . . . . This is really a farce when you consider that I really wanted to just discuss these matters with Malcolm in my living room. And that is what I said to Don on the phone. I said, "Gee, I really would like to debate him about that". I didn't realize the danger about getting into language. I should have said, "talk to him," or

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layer crosses over to the white
Villiams know it means the end

cal conversion to liberalism and
e end of *Saturday Night Fever*
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n more good-natured than others
argames, and *Short Circuit* all pit
ic right-wing counterparts. (This
to a lesser extent, in *American*
; David uses Goliath's own high-

BAILLIE, Bruce.

American. Born in Aberdeen, South Dakota, 24 September 1931. Educated at University of Minnesota, B.A. 1955; University of California at Berkeley, 1956–58; London School of Film Technique, 1959. Served in Korean War. Worked under Will Hindle for Marvin Becker Films, San Francisco, and began first film, *On Sundays*, 1960; started Canyon Cinema, San Francisco, 1961; taught film at Rice University, Houston, 1970 (later taught at Bard and Evergreen Colleges). Recipient: Creative Arts Award for Filmmaking, Brandeis University, 1970. Address: 669 W. 1050 South, Camano Island, WA 98292, U.S.A.

1965 *Yellow Horse*
1966 *Tung*; *Castro Street*; *All My Life*; *Still Life*; *Termination*; *Port Chicago*; *Show Leader*
1967 *Valentin De Las Sierras*
1970 *Quick Billy*
1971–present *Roslyn Romance* (multi-part film in progress)
1981–present *The Cardinal's Visit* (final section of *Roslyn Romance*)

Publications:

By BAILLIE: articles—

Frequent poems and letters, in *Canyon Cinema News* (San Francisco)
"Letters: San Francisco Film Scene," in *Film Culture* (New York), Summer 1963.
Interview with Richard Whitehall, in *Film Culture* (New York), Summer 1969.
Interview in *Film Culture* (New York), Spring 1971.
"Bruce Baillie," in *Film Comment* (New York), Spring 1971.
"Dr. Bish," in *Downtown Review*, Fall/Winter 1979/80, Spring 1980, Fall 1980.

On BAILLIE: books—

Hanhardt, John, and others, *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, New York, 1976.
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On BAILLIE: articles—

Callenbach, Ernest, "Bruce Baillie," in *Film Quarterly* (Berkeley), Fall 1964.
Polt, Harriet, "The Films of Bruce Baillie," in *Film Comment* (New York), Fall 1964.
Kent, Thomas, "San Francisco's Hipster Cinema," in *Film Culture* (New York), Spring 1967.
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* * *

The career of Bruce Baillie has two central aspects, which are also features of the whole American avant-garde film movement. First, his films are generally intensely poetic, lyrical evocations of persons and places in which the subject matter is transformed by the subjective methods used to photograph it. Second, many of his films display a strong social awareness, describing attitudes critical towards, and alienated from, mainstream American society. In many cases, Baillie fuses these concerns within single films.

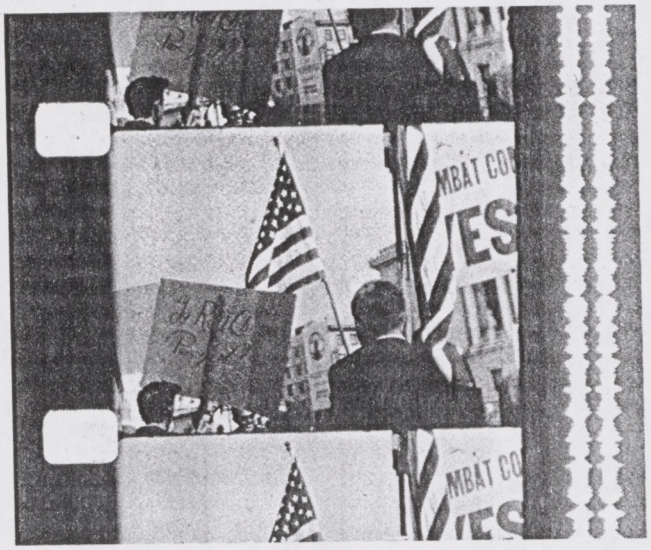
Stylistically, Baillie's films are characterized by images of haunting, evanescent beauty. An object will appear with spectacular clarity, only to dissolve away an instant later. Light itself often becomes a subject, shining across the frame or reflected from objects, suggesting a level of poetry in the subject matter that lies beyond easy interpretation. Baillie combines images with other images, and images with sound, in dense, collage-like structures. Thus, many of his films cut frequently between scenes, or superimpose objects on each other. One is constantly aware of a restlessness, an instability, which seems to result from his images' appearance and flow. It is significant, too, that many of Baillie's films contain, or are structured as, journeys.

The effect of Baillie's films is to make the viewer feel that any moment of the viewing, any single image he is looking at is a mere illusion that will soon vanish. The sensuousness of the light and colors only heighten one's awareness of their unreality. It is as if there is a void, a nothingness, that lies behind all things. It is not irrelevant in this regard that Baillie has evidenced strong interest, over the years, in Eastern religious thought.

Some degree of social comment is present in most of Baillie's films, but in widely varying degrees. *Mr. Hayashi* places the poetic and the social in a very precise balance. The imagery consists of evocative, sun-drenched images forming a short, haiku-like portrait of a man. On the soundtrack, we hear the man speak of his life, and his difficulty in finding work. *Mass* and *Quixote* indict American society as overly aggressive, toward its citizens, toward Native Americans, and toward nature; as impersonal and dehumanizing; as lacking physical or moral roots. For *Quixote*, Baillie uses an extremely dense, collage-like form, in which images and fragments of images are intercut with and superimposed on others, with a similarly complex soundtrack. At times, the film's multiple themes seem to blur into each other, as if the filmmaker is acknowledging that he is as "lost" as the society he is depicting.

Castro Street, Tung, and *Valentin de las Sierras* are, by contrast, apparently simpler portraits of people and places. By keeping his camera very close to things, Baillie renders their details ever more stunning, while his collage editing and soundtrack again create an instability leading to "nothingness". *Castro Street*, which depicts an industrialized area, is extraordinary for its combination of diverse photographic representations—black and white, color, positive and negative—in editing and superimposition. *Quick Billy* contains thematic and stylistic elements of most of Baillie's previous films; its motifs include autobiography, "portrait"-like representation of people and events, and an underlying theme, made explicit in the film's final section, of Western man's aggressiveness toward his surroundings.

—Fred Camper



NEWS NO. 3

Audio Brandon Films Vol. I 1976-77

STEVEN ARNOLD and MICHAEL WIESE

MESSAGES, MESSAGES
30 min. 1969

MESSAGES, MESSAGES is an exciting exploration of a young man's subconscious, and is conceived as a journey through a world of complex, surrealistic imagery. Its creators, Steven Arnold and Michael Wiese have said: "Messages, Messages—A vast tapestry exploring the phenomenon of psychic life enters the mirrored corridors of a world resplendent with winged cloud creatures—insect women—underwater cities—gardens of lunar labyrinths—grottos of transparent levitating bodies—Messages, Messages is an offering."

To present this dream-like world, the directors have used stark, chiaroscuro black-and-white; flickering shadows across faces; bodies which seem to float; hideous and frightening images of people; and fantastic costumes, makeup, and settings. But despite this, and the directors' own statement, the film is ultimately not concerned with its elaborate trappings. It is a serious study of the mind, and its images transcend their immediate sensual significance into a universal meaning.

BRUCE BAILLIE

"My own method so far has been to enter — thoughtlessly — into the environment of a new film, discover the film while it is taking shape."

Baillie's films begin with images that are concrete and contemporary. Many of his films — portraits of people, places, incidents — have a strong documentary flavor. We seem to be seeing 'slices of life' that reveal keen insights not only into the individual subjects being depicted, but the larger societies, movements, patterns of which they're a part.

Beneath all the films, however, there lies a strong element of romanticism. The world Baillie presents is a constantly changing one, fluid and elusive as "her bright shadow" in **Tung** and the motorcyclist in **Mass.** This flux is at the source of Baillie's lyricism; it is that which no careful, objective portrayal can pin down. The geometric patterns of Baillie's compositions relate to a reality that can be intellectually understood and morally judged. The spontaneity of his single takes and moving shots suggest longings which no state of reality can ever fulfill. The tensions stemming from this duality, between formalism and improvisation, are posed thematically by the conflict between the individual and society in several of Baillie's films. And even in a 3 minute, one-shot film as simple as **All My Life,** Baillie transforms a simple early summer scene into one that is full of implied associations, remembered emotions and occurrences.

ON SUNDAYS
26 min. 1960-61

Baillie's first film depicts a young woman's encounter with an old alcoholic in an abandoned house just outside San Francisco. The easy freedom to the girl's manner and life is contrasted with the grim, trapped world of the skid row alcoholics. Remarkably advanced for a first film, themes and visual patterns that were to become a vital part of Baillie's vocabulary are given poignant expression through Baillie's treatment of this unusual relationship. The film opens on a montage gradually pulling away from rigidly symmetrical shots of San Francisco industry to open shots of two dogs and the film's heroine playing out in the countryside — a notable pattern of **Castro Street, To Parsifal** and other Baillies. The film ends on a sequence of the young woman dancing, the central image of **Tung.**

EVERYMAN — NEWS NO. 3 — MR. HAYASHI
11 min. 1961 - 1962

EVERYMAN records a protest demonstration outside the courthouse in which men are being tried for sailing a boat called "Everyman" too close to the Pacific nuclear testing area. NEWS NO. 3 intercuts similar shots of a Cuban rally and the rock formations by which the rally is taking place. MR. HAYASHI is a portrait of "a real, living saint," a poor gardener whose anguished life has never altered his love of nature and his work.

THE GYMNASTS
8 min. 1962

A fantasy of liberation. "Basically a dramatic form, concerning young business man (played by film-maker) who in the course of some everyday transaction finds himself among performing gymnasts, whom he joins. In the end of the film he is seen once again 'at the same moment' before he entered the gymnasium."

HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF TALKING TO THE DIRECTOR?

14 min. 1962

A claustrophobic view of the individual within society, parallelled to the mental patient within a hospital. Improvisatory scenes of a group of people playing music, dancing, having a good time, are contrasted with a man's haunting memories. "Made on the north coast of California in Mendocino . . . combining spontaneity and preconception in a film that is essentially a short lesson in feature form. On one level, a portrait of Paul Tulley."

A HURRAH FOR SOLDIERS

4 min. Color 1962 - 63

"Dedicated to Albert Verbrugghe, whose wife was killed in Katanga by U.N. soldiers. Presentiment of the meeting of historic forces . . ." Lyric images of the ocean at sunset are intercut with scenes of birds flying over the water, stained glass windows, a priest, a man being symbolically slain, photographs of injured men. One of Baillie's simplest and most moving films, it is a striking, reverential ode to life, as well as a somber representation of mourning.

TO PARSIFAL

16 min. Color 1963

Grand Prize, Ann Arbor Film Festival, 1963. Golden Gate Award, San Francisco International Film Festival, 1963. The ocean and mountains, a boat and railroad train are the central subjects of Baillie's film, using the European legend as basic structure and hero, and Richard Wagner's music for the soundtrack. The film is a depiction of "he who becomes slowly wise," the most direct and lyrical film of nature of Baillie's early period.

MASS

24 min. 1963 - 64

Grand Prize, Ann Arbor Film Festival, 1964. "No chance for me to live, Mother, you might as well mourn." Baillie uses the structure of the Mass, traditionally a celebration of life, as the form for his portrayal of a society, our own, feeding on the death of another society, that of the American Indian. A Funereal tone pervades the film, one that stresses irony and contrast — the applause preceding the shot of the dead man on the pavement, the Rolls Royce behind the hero's motorcycle on the highway, etc.

QUIXOTE

45 min. Color & B/W 1964 - 65

Baillie's epic portrait of America, shot during his six month odyssey across the states. Scenes of the nation's industry, workers, teenagers at a basketball game, poverty stricken Indians on a reservation, TV superheroes, desert and mountain landscapes are interspersed in a film journey that juxtaposes the aspirations and reality of America. "Climaxing the film-maker's first period of work, QUIXOTE is a kind of summary and conclusion of a number of themes, etc., especially that of the **hero** . . . depicting Western orientation as essentially one of conquest."

YELLOW HORSE

8 min. Color 1965

A solo string bass accompanies scenes of a motorcycle race. Much of it shot in slow motion and soft focus, Baillie stresses the grace and rhythmic beauty of the scene over the more familiar impressions of tension and speed — a beauty not unlike that of the muscular coordination of steeds.

TUNG

5 min. Color, Silent 1966

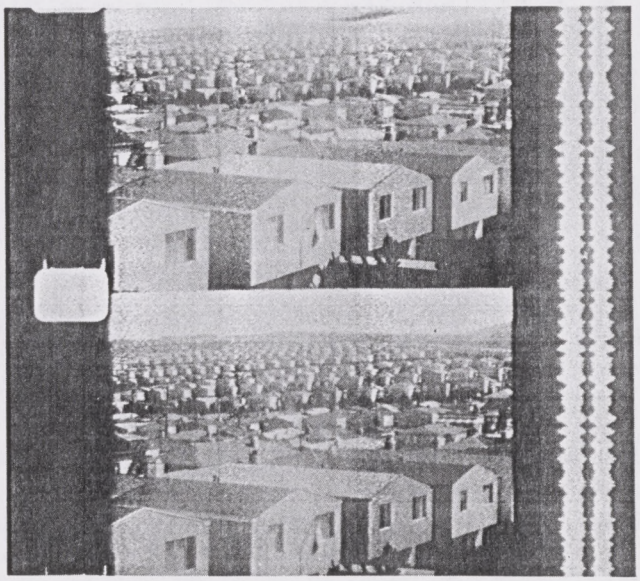
Shots of a girl dancing in black and white negative are intercut, superimposed over shots moving along plants, some out of focus, in Baillie's most intensely lyrical film. The film ends on a note of memory and romance, applicable to many of his other films: "Seeing her bright shadow I thought she was someone I/ you/ we had known." The film is a "portrait of a friend named Tung, deriving directly from a momentary image of waking."

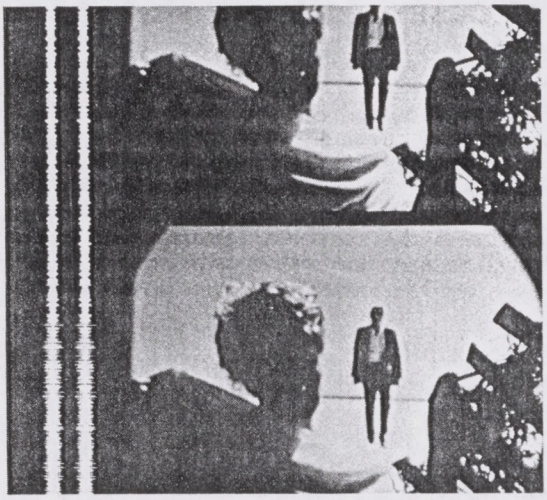
CASTRO STREET

10 min. Color 1966

Perhaps Baillie's best known film, the work is a tour-de-force in its use of color and camera movement in expressing a set of complicated, often paradoxical feelings for a locale. "Inspired by a lesson from Eric Satie; a film in the form of a street — Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California . . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks and buildings on the other — the street and film, ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street is black-and-white (secondary), and one is color like male and female elements. The emergence of a long switch engineer shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential image of **consciousness.**"

CASTRO STREET





2

ALL MY LIFE

3 min. Color 1966

"All My Life," a wistful song by Ella Fitzgerald is played over a single shot, panning slowly along a fence surrounded by the bright flowers of early summer, and ending on the deep blue sky above it. The simplicity of the composition and camera movement, the richness of colors combine in creating a captivating aura of romance and nostalgia.

STILL LIFE

2 min. Color 1966

The camera holds on a single shot of one dimly lit room, photographed from another, as a group of friends sit, talk, walk back and forth. The classical precision of the framing contrasts with the freewheeling spontaneity of the dialogue and action. "Summer, 1966; coming out of the artist's period of life at Graton — a communal venture in the woods north of San Francisco. A film on efforts toward new American religion."

PORT CHICAGO

10 min. 1966

Demonstrators hold a peace vigil outside a U.S. Naval weapons station. The soundtrack intercuts a Lyndon Johnson press conference with on-the-scene dialogue of the demonstrators. "You see, to me, one of the first things is understanding another man's pain," one of the demonstrators says; and this seems a vital aspect of what Baillie sets out to accomplish in his poetic document.

VALENTIN

10 min. Color 1968

Technically one of Baillie's simplest films, VALENTIN may well be Baillie's most beautiful and impassioned film. The film chronicles a day in the life of a poor Mexican family, beginning on the dim light of daybreak, as the mother sweeps up the floor, ending on children playing ball by the soft twilight. The central motif is a blind man accompanying himself on guitar as he sings the song "Valentin." The sense of peace and natural harmony at the core of **Mr. Hayashi** are the most striking features of this tribute to self-expression.

BROOKFIELD RECREATION CENTER

8 min.

"Children exploring the rhythms of the universe through art." A percussive soundtrack backs up scenes of elementary school children dancing, beating out rhythms on drums and tables, shaping clay figures, running in a playground — expressing internal feelings through physical activity. Opening and closing on the same simple shots, the center of the film is filled with physical energy. The film's cyclical nature is that of a song, its careful structuring of uncontrolled, spontaneous joy and activity that of a Gloria.

SCOTT BARTLETT

METANOMEN

8 min. 1966

This first film, produced while Bartlett was a student at San Francisco State College, has won many awards, including the First Prize, Experimental Category, National Student Film Awards. It is a study of a couple, set against a railroad yard, photographed in stark black-and-white, and accompanied by a haunting score. Techniques employed include negative images, extreme high contrast, superimposition, and divided frame. Film-maker Lenny Lipton has said of METANOMEN: "The film is so interesting because it harnesses a kind of rhythmic conflict. The film is tense, and out of this tenseness arises the vision of an enigmatic girl, set in opposition to a man shown as a contrasty profile. The two characters are set in a flux of manipulated technology run wild, and in this sense, the film reminded me of RED DESERT. . . . The rushing shapes, and multiple forms, and combinations of forms, beat against each other and at the couple, who seem to be rushing toward each other, across a harsh, contrasty, black-and-white landscape."

ROBERT BEAN

2

9 min. Color 1967

This is a devastatingly funny parody that takes a delicious slap at art films, particularly those of Antonioni and Fellini. A young man and young woman meet on an ocean beach, he rather suave in appearance and she outlandishly attired in a flowing gown. After some initial horseplay, they engage in conversation — in Italian with English subtitles — but what conversation and what subtitles! They are guaranteed to keep any foreign film audience howling. TV comedienne Renee Taylor wrote this clever film, and plays the part of the woman. The musical and vocal accompaniment is adapted from a Yardley Men's Toiletries TV commercial. It's an absolute must, and our guess is that you'll find more than one occasion to show it.

Movie Journal

Jonas Mekas

Seminar with Bruce Baillie
Port Washington Public Library, L.I.

A relaxing 30 minutes ride from Penn Station via L.I. Railroad brought me to Port Washington Public Library, to Bruce Baillie seminar. It takes much longer to get to some screenings in Manhattan, and I am anxious to pass this piece of information to the readers because I know some of you will want to attend Bruce Conner seminar, November 18-20. The seminars are sponsored by the Nassau Library System and conducted by Marie Grieco, and may gods bless them for what they are doing.

The Baillie seminar was attended by about thirty people, mostly representatives of libraries, universities and schools. Most of them came from L.I., but some came from New York and even from as far as Princeton. The seminar announcement stresses that the seminars are intended primarily "for librarians, library school students and other educators." But practically, it is open to all.

So, there was Bruce, with his dog Billy Joe, his trailer, and his films which were screened and rescreened and talked and discussed and argued by Marie Grieco, Scott Nygren, and the participants. And Bruce himself, in his quiet and relaxed manner spoke about how he made them, what he thinks about them, and what he thinks about many other things in art and life. We saw two sessions of excerpts from his work in progress, "Roslyn Romance," filmed in a very factual and down-to-earth manner, film notes on his friends and neighbors, the footage he is in process of structuring into a projectible unity—a footage that is beautiful and moving even as is. Bruce is desperate to find a place, anywhere, a place large, hospitable and peaceful enough where he could park his trailer, keep his dog, unpack the cans of film and do his work—a place with no rent to pay, because where is he going to get money to pay the rent, where can any artist that is not selling himself/herself neither to commerce nor universities get money to pay the rent? So, keep your eyes and ears open about this matter, that is, a place for Bruce to work and live, to stay until he's finished with "Roslyn Romance." He says it may take him a year and a half to complete the film.

I resaw Bruce's work. More than ever I was impressed by the beauty and power of his work. This time in particular I was moved by "Quick Billy." It's a towering, magnificent work. The images, the sounds, the structure. The screen sings to you, as Kubelka would say. Ah, the art of cinema, ah, Bruce, if I'd only have a house to put you up, and a plate for your dog—that is so little that an artist like you is asking for, and I think you are one of America's great artists and a beautiful human being. Of course, you are, Bruce. Of course, you are a character, you have your own ways of living, your own spaces and pauses, and siestas, and etc. and etc. You don't like to rush, you don't like to speak loud, you don't like to preach, you don't even like to call yourself an artist. As a matter of fact, you said, at the Seminar, that you don't even know if art is any good, you would like instead to work with a teacher, you said, and maybe quit making films—but I know you won't, and I know your work is one of humanity's great teachers, and believe me or not you've had a teacher for years now, Bruce, one of the greatest teachers there is, and the name of your teacher is Muse, don't you know that, Bruce?

So where am I? Oh, yes, I am at Port Washington Public Library, at Bruce Baillie seminar, and Bruce is sitting on the stool and talking, or standing, and he's talking very low, not too loud, but we can hear him, and Billy Joe, Bruce's dog, is lying under the chair, and she is watching Bruce, a beautiful wolf dog; and I am here, from New York, thirty minutes from New York, and outside is all color, it's autumn—it's fine, very fine, life is O.K., and art is O.K., when it's done from the very heart and with such total involvement as that of Bruce's and when it's supervised by the Muse. ●

TUNG by Bruce Baille (1966), 5 min., b & w and color, silent

"Baille calls this a 'portrait of a friend named Tung, deriving directly from a momentary image on waking." This indicates that the film's source is not in daily eyesight but in those curiously fleeting images which appear at the boundaries between sleep and wakefulness, and the fragile, elusive quality of the film's imagery confirms this. A woman's head in Black and White negative is superimposed on fragmentary nature imagery; the result is haunting, other-worldly, as if the images we see do not inhabit the space of our daily lives. The film's silence (this is Baille's only silent film) is absolute, and adds to the image's 'otherness.'

"Tung is a short portrait, but with less specifics offered about the subject--we learn nothing "concrete" about her. Her ... image, which is the only specific thing we have of her ... produces a sense of almost vanishing ethereality. Yet the possibility remains that that ethereality, which seems to grow out of her image, may well derive from her presence as a person, and so the portrait may well be as true to her as it is to the

cinematheque program notes 1987

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE "NEW FORMS IN FILM"
MONTREUX 1974
ED. ANNETTE MICHELSON

CRITICAL ESSAYS AND STATEMENTS BY FILM-MAKERS

BRUCE BAILLIE AND THE LYRICAL FILM

by

P. Adams Sitney

Of the many film-makers of the sixties working in the lyrical mode after Brakhage's initial work, Bruce Baillie has had the surest voice of his own.

In his lyrical films, Baillie turns from the uneasy inwardness of Brakhage's work to a problematic study of the heroic. *Mr. Hayashi* (1961), *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* (1962), *A Hurrah for Soldiers* (1962-63), and *To Parsifal* (1963) prepared the ground for his major extended lyrics, *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964) and *Quixote* (1965, revised 1967). The first of these films was made as a newsreel advertisement to be shown at Baillie's film society, Canyon Cinema, in the second year of its existence. It shows a Japanese gardener, Mr. Hayashi, performing his daily tasks in a few black and white shots. The form is intentionally brief, minor, and occasional; although there is no metaphor or conflict of images, it reminds one of the aspiration first voiced by Maya Deren and later echoed by Brakhage to create a cinematic haiku. The plastic and formal tradition indigenous to San Francisco, the center of Baillie's activity, owes something to oriental, and specifically Japanese, aesthetics. The oriental "saint" in a fusion of Zen, Tao, and Confucian traditions is the first of the heroes proposed by Baillie's cinema. The second, Parsifal, logically prefigures the first; his quest seeks the reconciliation of nature and mind that makes the oriental saint possible.

In *Mass* and *Quixote* he subtly blends glimpses of the heroic *personae* with despairing reflections on violence and ecological disaster. In the earlier films those poles were explored in separate, and much weaker works. *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* casually articulates an image of sexual loss and paranoia by combining an interview-like monologue about girlfriends in a moving car and on the streets of a small California town with a frame story derived from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari;* that is, Baillie repeatedly cuts from the speaker to him sitting silently in the corridor of a hospital, and the sinister doctor who whispers near him appears—no longer as a doctor—at significant points in the events outside the hospital. In *A Hurrah for Soldiers* Baillie naively attempted to illuminate an elliptical and rhythmically edited scene of imagined violence—a man attacked by a gang of girls—with photographs of actual violence from a newspaper. He is more successful in the mixing of sounds in this film than in the cutting of images. In his major lyrical films he extended his natural talent for sound fusion to a textured visual surface which uses superimposition and often mixtures of negative and positive black-and-white with color, in a rhetoric of slow transformations. His notes for Mass give a clear picture of its structure:

> A film Mass, dedicated to that which is vigorous, intelligent, lovely, the-best-in-Man; that which work suggests is nearly dead.
>
> Brief guide to the structure of the film:
>
> *Introit:* A long, lightly exposed section composed in the camera.
>
> *Kyrie:* A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge accompanied by the sound of the Gregorian Chant. The *epistle* is in several sections. In this central part, the film becomes gradually more outrageous, the material being either televi-

sion or the movies, photographed directly from the screen. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout the *epistle.*

Gloria: The sound of a siren and a short sequence with a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel.

The final section of the *communion* begins with the *offertory* in a procession of lights and figures in the second chant.

The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The touring car arrives, with the celebrants; the body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isolated people accompanied by the final chant.

At the very beginning he shows a man struggling and dying on a city street at night, ignored by passers-by as if he were a drunk collapsed in the street. In the subsequent weaving of moving camera shots, in counterpointed superimpositions of factories, expanses of prefabricated houses, traffic, parades, and markets, all complemented by a soundtrack that blends Gregorian chant with street noises in shifting degrees of priority, the viewer tends to forget the dying man or to see him as the forecast of the section of the film that enjambs bits of war films with advertisements shot directly off a television without kinescopic rectification so that the images continually show bands and jump.

Contrasted to the images of waste and violence, a motorcyclist appears in the traffic and Baillie follows him, shooting from a moving car for a very long time. He is the tentative vehicle of the heroic in this film. But when he too disappears in the welter of superimposition, we do not expect his return. Instead the movement shifts to the grill of a 1933 Cadillac as it cruises the highway. As the second part of the film circles back on itself, the Cadillac turns out to be the ambulance/hearse which brings doctors to the man on the street and which carries away his dead body. Then when it reenters the highway, Baillie again shifts the emphasis to the motorcyclist, whose second disappearance concludes the film.

Two images demonstrate the ironic pessimism with which Baillie views the American landscape at the center of the film. Over the sprawl of identical prefabricated houses he prints the words of Black Elk: "Behold, a good nation malking in a sacred manner in a good land!" Then he pans to an American flag waving on a tall pole in the distance. By changing the focus without cutting from the shot, he brings to view a previously unseen barbed wire fence between the camera and the flag. "The Mass is traditionally a celebration of Life," he wrote in the Film-Makers Cooperative catalogue, "thus the contradiction between the form of the Mass and the theme of Death. The dedication is to the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass."

In *To Parsifal* Baillie began to elaborate his equivocal relationship to technology by employing the train both as a symbol of the waste land and the heroic thrust of the Grail quester. The motorcyclist of *Mass* possesses some of that ambivalence. But it is in *Quixote* that Baillie utilizes the tension between the heroics and the blindness of technology as a generative principle for the organization of the whole film. He told Richard Whitehall:

> *Quixote* was my last western-hero form. I summarized a lot of things. I pretty much emphasized the picture of an American as a conquistador. A conquering man. For example, up in Montana there's a bridge being put up, driving straight through the mountains, and it was half made when I got there.
>
> They're chopping their way right through. And, to me, that was the best explanation of what western man was up to.

In many ways *Quixote* restates the structural principles of *Mass* with increased irony and ambiguity. For instance, the tentative protagonist of the earlier film, the motorcyclist who appears near the beginning and the end, becomes a flying man, a movie version of Superman, at both ends of the later film. Despite his sophistication, Baillie remains an innocent; the whole of his cinema exhibits an alteration between two irreconcilable themes: the sheer beauty of the phenomenal world (few films are as graceful to the eye as his, few are as sure of their colors) and the utter despair of forgotten men. It is in *Quixote* alone that these two themes emerge into a dialectical form, an antithesis of grace and disgrace.

The incessant forward movement of *Mass* leads to the meandering journey, of which *Quixote* is the diary, of a film-maker in search of a hero who can be his mediator without irony. But the series of agents he finds cannot sustain that burden: they are tired Indians in a luncheonette, an old farmer, a prizefighter reduced to Bowery life, a naked girl, the artificial Superman, and even animals (a turtle, horses). In their impotence, the lyrical film-maker, himself a Quixotic observer without Anger's confidence that the cinema is a magical weapon, becomes the hero of his own film as he descends through

a nostalgia for the lost Indian civilizations (manifested in the intercutting of contemporary chiefs with turn-of-the-century photographs of the tribes) to a vision of New York streets meshed with a collage of old films and footage of the war in Vietnam.

With Baillie we return to an aspect of the visionary film-maker suspended since our discussion of Maya Deren: his role as a champion of reform for the film-makers' plight. In 1961 he founded Canyon Cinema, the first permanent showcase for the avant-garde film in the San Francisco area since the collapse of Art in Cinema more than a decade earlier. The next year it moved from the town of Canyon, still keeping the name, to Berkeley and initiated a newspaper, *The Canyon Cinema News.* Shortly afterward he founded the Canyon Cinema Co-operative, following the example of Jonas Mekas and the original Film-Makers Cooperative in New York. Although Baillie soon retired as the chief administrator of the Canyon Cinema functions, they continue today much in the spirit in which they were founded. The visionary inspiration which informs the work of the American avant-garde film-maker has in many instances spread to the creation of his institutions.

Stan Brakhage, too, has been influential in the formation and promotion of organizations to benefit the film-maker. He was one of the founding members of Mekas' Cooperative, and in its early years he acted as an informal ambassador, uniting factions in different parts of the country whom he encountered in his lecture tours. One of his major concerns has been the encouragement of private libraries of 8 mm and 16 mm films. To promote this idea and promote careful and repeated viewing of films, he has been uncomfortable in his alliances with the community of film-makers and has on several occasions withdrawn his films from cooperatives and attacked them. His motives have been for the most part aesthetic, not economic; and within the politics of aesthetic he has fought, with all the polemical means at his disposal, tendencies he felt were contrary to the making and reception of films as revelation. Repeatedly he has invoked the myth of Faust in his periodic attacks on other film-makers and ideas, reserving for himself a Prometheanism, wherein the commitment to aesthetic perfection and prophetic revelation triumphs over seduction. His repeated reconciliations with film-makers' institutions are usually attended by confessions that his dramatic response was personally essential to the rooting out of drama from his films. Markopoulos, too, and in spite of his enthusiastic appraisal of the inspired work of the cooperatives, has withdrawn, returned, and then withdrawn his films again without the public histrionics of Brakhage.

But Baillie has eschewed the polemical struggle in the ten years he has been making films. His rare interviews reflect his pacific personality, generosity, and disinterest in theory. Since the mid-sixties, he has traveled continually, living out of his Volkswagen bus, in a tent in the California commune of Morting Star, or in a cabin by the ocean in Fort Bragg. A persistent struggle with serious hepatitis since 1967 has circumscribed his activities and generated a meditation on death in his longest film so far, *Quick Billy* (1971).

In the end, the argument between consciousness and nature is as crucial to Baillie's cinema as it is to Brakhage's. But it is problematic because the weight of the dialogue seems to rest outside of the film, especially in the prolific stream of films from the late sixties—*Tung* (1966), *Castro Street* (1966), *All My Life* (1966), *Still Life* (1966), and *Valentin de las Sierras* (1967). In these, the eye of the film-maker quiets his mind with images of reconciliation; the dialectics of cinematic thought become calm in the filming of the privileged moment of reconciliation. In an interview with Richard Corliss, he describes his achievement as a film-maker and the fundamental shortcoming of that achievement:

> Now, I can answer a little bit just for myself, as having been a film artist. I always felt that I brought as much truth out of the environment as I could, but I'm tired of coming *out of*. . . . I want everybody really lost, and I want us all to be at home there. Something like that. Actually I am not interested in that, but I mean that's what you could do. Lots of people would like it. I have to say finally what I *am* interested in, like Socrates: peace . . . rest . . . nothing.

Baillie's two versions of the structural film, coinciding with the general emergence of that form, draw upon his lyrical films and point toward the consecration of the privileged moment. By replacing a form which has internal evolution with a monomorphic shape and by affirming the priority of the mechanics of the tools over the eye of the film-maker, the structural film terminates the dialectics of the lyrical and mythopoeic forms. Baillie comes to it in the apparent hope of subduing the reflective ego and, at least tentatively, exploring deep space and unquestioned natural objects. In *All My Life* (1966) he pans along a fence lined with rose bushes.

Then in the same slow movement of the unstopping camera, he switches from the horizontal to the vertical, rising above the fence into the sky, resting in a composition of two telephone lines trisecting the blue field. The movement lasts as long as it takes Ella Fitzgerald to sing "All My Life" on the soundtrack. Its complement, *Still Life* (1966), fixes an interior view with an unmoving camera. The voices on its soundtrack suggest that the dim figures by the far window are looking at a series of photographs of shrines devoted to Ramakrishna. Baillie refers to this in the Film-Makers Cooperative catalogue as "A film on efforts toward a new American religion."

Castro Street returns to the lyrical form with a renewed lushness of texture and color. His note for it is typically gnomic and tantalizing in its guarded hints about his working process:

> Inspired by a lesson from Erik Satie; a film in the form of a street—Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California . . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks and buildings on the other—the street and film, ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street, one side is black-and-white (secondary), and one side is color—like male and female elements. The emergence of a long switch-engine shot (black-and-white solo) is to the film-maker the essential of *consciousness.*

A different note subtitles it "The Coming of Consciousness".

The film begins slowly and gradually changes pace several times. Its fusion of black-and-white negative with color, often moving in opposite directions, recalls Brakhage's micro-rhythms. The superimposition tends to destroy depth and to reduce foreground and background to two hovering planes, one slightly in front of the other. The opening movement, accompanied by the sound of a train in slow motion, occurs on the back plane. An iris isolates a smokestack, then slowly wanders on the screen, drifting toward the upper right corner. The first dynamic image is of a negative, high-contrast power line moving in the superimposition.

Baillie occasionally uses slightly distorted images of the trains and the railroad yard with prismatic colors around the border of distinct shapes. He also uses images which were recorded by an improperly threaded camera so that they appear to jump or waver up and down on the screen. A ghost image of a man and the numbers from the side of a boxcar jump in this way on the foreground layer early in the film. Soon afterward part of the screen clears to show a red filament inside a tube; for Baillie not only uses superimpositions but soft masking devices so that parts of the screen will be single-layered, while the rest is double, or will contain a third element which appears on neither one of the superimposition layers, as if melted into the picture.

As the trains move faster, the pace of the film changes. The smokestack in the iris returns, now red-filtered and occupying the center of the screen. Another central iris replaces it, looking out on violets in a yellow field; slowly an old Southern Pacific engine pulls into the iris beyond the violets, recalling the later movements of *To Parsifal.* A yellow car crosses almost pure white negative cars.

At this point in the film we hear whistles, muted voices, and the tinkling of a piano. A curtain is drawn open to show the blue of the sky, and then it closes, blending immediately into the superimpositions, which become progressively anamorphic. To the sound of clangs, negative and color trains move in opposite directions across the screen, ending in the dominance of a silhouetted negative engine with a man in it, slowly crossing the field of vision. This is the image Baillie refers to as the "essential of consciousness".

Just before the film ends another negative figure takes over the film. The camera follows the blazing white pants of a walking workman, then shows his polka-dot shirt. His appearance crowns the passing negative of the engine and its conductor. Then a red, dome-like barn appears while a sign, saying "Castro Street", pointing in the direction opposite to that of the camera, marks the film's conclusion.

Both Brakhage and Baillie push in their later lyrical films toward cinematic visions of impersonal or unqualified consciousness. In films such as *Pasht, Fire of Waters,* and *Castro Street* they succeed in momentarily disengaging the self from vision. But that came only after they had invented and pursued a form that could articulate that complex relation for the first time in cinema.

omance in Roslyn

Taubin

Baillie
n Romance (Is It Really True?)
& II
gy Film Archives

Baillie has made two exquisite
ns, *All My Life* and *Still Life*. His
lms, *Quixote* and *Quick Billy*,
brilliant in part, have never really
ether for me.

slyn Romance, Baillie's most re-
(the Parts I & II of the title seem
te that it is not yet complete) is his
nd most mature work. Here, he
nded the precision and density of
films to a more complex form.

ittle has been written about the re-
of the filmmakers of the New
n Cinema to Bazinian film theory;
emphasis is always placed on the
sionist aspect of these films. But in
of the film diarists — like Jonas
Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow —
the echo of Bazin, particularly of
y "The Ontology of the Photo-
Image," which relates photo-
and film to "the mummy com-
o the making of images as a de-
ainst the passage of time, against
While photographs offer us "lives
a set moment of their duration,
m their destiny," film is "the im-
ings and of their duration, change
ied as it were."

entral image of *A Roslyn Romance*
ze-frame, a hybrid image neither
moving. An elderly man is seated
ight-backed chair with his head
ack while an elderly woman bends
holding a razor which is poised
throat. The image is frozen for
seconds to the sounds of howling
nd a droning airplane. This
e film image speaks of the
eness of intimacy — of a history
lived in the interdependence,
trust, habituation and proximity
f the duration of this relationship,
sed and mummified in this image
both within and without time.

)-minute film spans fall and winter
& Part II). A small number of ele-
re combined and recombined in a
mplex manner. The images are a
n of old photographs and
ls on a table — the elderly couple,
nd branches, children sledding,
rior of a country house and its
ow, a series of titles from a diary
in the '70s, and a younger man
erhaps the filmmaker. The sounds
d, the airplane, bells, accordian
nd a conversation between an
elderly woman with a heavy Europe
cent and a younger man, again perhaps the
filmmaker.

The film has signs of being a diary, but
the relationship of the filmmaker to the
sounds and images that he records is never
specified. Nor is the relationship of the
people in the photographs to one another,
nor that of the man on the sound tract to
the woman on the sound track, nor that of
any of the people filmed to one another.

A romance is a literary form characterized through its long history from the Greeks through the nineteenth century by exotic adventure and tales of courtly and idealized love. And for me, and perhaps for Baillie, the lives of these old people in Roslyn, Long Island, is distant and exotic. How distant am I, a modern feminist, from the voice of that woman, laughingly describing someone as "a good man" and implying that a lifetime of obedience and respect and love could be founded on a woman's respect for that goodness.

Baillie dedicates the film to his mother. I'm sure she likes it tremendously. But I do too and I can think of very few contemporary works which can mediate two such different sensibilities and experiences as ours must be. •

V, March 9, 1978

AFI PREVIEW MAY 80

WHITNEY BIENNIAL PROGRAM #8

Sat, May 17, 4:45 pm

Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?) Intro I and II by Bruce Baillie, 1977, 18 minutes.

Notes for Jerome by Jonas Mekas, 1978, 45 minutes.

"Although the curators did not select films with certain categories in mind, the works fell naturally into certain broad groupings. One such category is the autobiographical film, which, during the past two years, engaged a number of leading filmmakers. Jonas Mekas is known for his work in the 'diary' mode. His *Notes for Jerome* was edited in 1978 from material shot in 1966 at Cassis, France, the Summer home of Jerome Hill, himself a filmmaker as well as patron of the avant-garde cinema. The combination of short takes and pixilations creates a lovely visual impression of Cassis, while the titles, soundtrack (mostly recorded later) and the very mood of the film evoke the Lithuania of Mekas' childhood, making the film not just a memory of a specific place and time, but also a meditation—on many levels—of the artist's past. Another artist whose work reflects an autobiographical impulse in Bruce Baillie, for many years a dominant figure among California avant-garde filmmakers. Baillie has created in *Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?) Intro I & II* a poetic memory of his own boyhood and roots in the Dakotas, by combining family photos and old postcards with images of nature and an evocative soundtrack."—John G. Hanhardt, Curator, and Mark Segal, Assistant Curator, Film and Video Department, Whitney Museum of American Art.

3/18/76

5 Shorts by Bruce Baillie at Film Forum

THE FILMS OF BRUCE BAILLIE. Five short films made in the 1960's by the American avant-garde director. ALL MY LIFE, MASS FOR THE DAKOTA SIOUX, CASTRO STREET, QUIXOTE and VALENTIN DE LAS SIERRAS. At the Film Forum, 15 Vandam Street, March 11-14 and 18-21 at 7:30 P.M.

By RICHARD EDER

Bruce Baillie makes avant-garde films with the gifts of a painter and the objectives of a sign painter. A visual sensibility and a delicacy in balancing images founder in a determination to hammer these elements into sweeping and often crude social messages.

In five films, made in the 1960's and being shown this week and next at the Film Forum, Mr. Baillie gives evidence both of his talent and the distance by which it outruns his artistic judgment.

•

As for the talent, take the first of the five films, a tiny and beautiful piece entitled "All My Life." The soundtrack has Ella Fitzgerald singing the song that gives the film its name. The camera travels along masses of brilliant red flowers growing against a fence under a blue sky.

It is very simple, and it would simply be a pretty thing to watch except that Mr. Baillie has struck upon a visual correlative of the singing that goes much further.

The flowers are wild and unkept, amid weeds and overgrown scrub, in the back lots of a slum somewhere on the edge of town. They are dusty flowers. It is obvious that there is broken glass and bits of rusty tin in the underbrush. Flaming red and a tenement roughness: Ella Fitzgerald has been remarkably seized and set to film.

The two major pieces in the program, "Mass for the Dakota Sioux" and "Quixote," show moments of the same lilting use of the camera. Both pictures are roughly similar: long assemblies of bits and pieces of American life, some seen plainly; others blurred, abbreviated or superimposed for complexity of mood. They are arrived in their whole at conveying a sense of emptiness, of cheapness, of violence, of futility.

"Mass" is done with more subtlety; and for the first third or so it promises to embody hauntingly the lament of Chief Sitting Bull that serves as epigraph: "No chance for me to live, Mother." But it goes on too long. There is a sameness and, by now, a triteness in juxtaposing advertising slogans, battleships firing, politicians making speeches and high school parades and filming it darkly and blurrily to suggest oppression.

•

"Quixote" is much the same, but much longer. Forty-five minutes is excessive for this continual hammering of weighted images. And the weighting is even cruder. Mr. Baillie shoots a Rotary-style banquet and intercuts the diners' faces with views of pigs at a trough. Or he shows a high-school basketball game.

Now the movements in a basketball game, however little interest you take in the sport, are by any conceivable judgment buoyant, cheerful and often of considerable grace. Mr. Baillie edits and chops so it is all sharp elbows and gaping expressions. It becomes jerky and violent.

Similarly we see a horse on the ground, apparently dying. No, it is not dying; it is getting up. Projected at a certain speed and cut in a certain fashion life becomes death. Out of this, all possible messages can be made; and when they are, none commands belief or respect.

SPRING

SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE

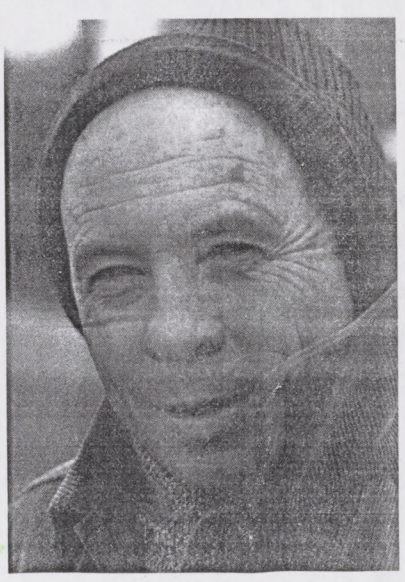
LECTURES

1995

BRUCE BAILLIE

filmmaker

Monday, April 17



BRUCE BAILLIE
photo: Fr. James Geoghegan, O.C.D.

A major figure in avant garde filmmaking since the early 1960s, Bruce Baillie has produced a body of work that encompasses lyrical studies in color and form as well as searing socio-political images of the US. A recurring them in Baillie's work is the coexistence of opposing realities: technology and innocence, freedom and oppression, crowding and solitude. One critic writes: "Despite his sophistication, Baillie remains an innocent; the whole of his cinema exhibits an alternation between two irreconcilable themes: the sheer beauty of the phenomenal world and the utter despair of forgotten men." The founder of Canyon Cinematheque, Baillie's films include *Roslyn Romance*, *Quick Billy*, *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*, *All My Life*, *Castro Street*, *To Parsifal* and *Quixote*. Baillie has screened his films at venues across the country, including San Francisco Cinematheque, the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley and the Film Forum in New York.

Baillie's lecture is cosponsored by San Francisco Cinematheque.

Millenium Film Journal No. 4/5
Summer/Fall 1979

Bruce Baillie's Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)

SUE ANN ESTEVEZ

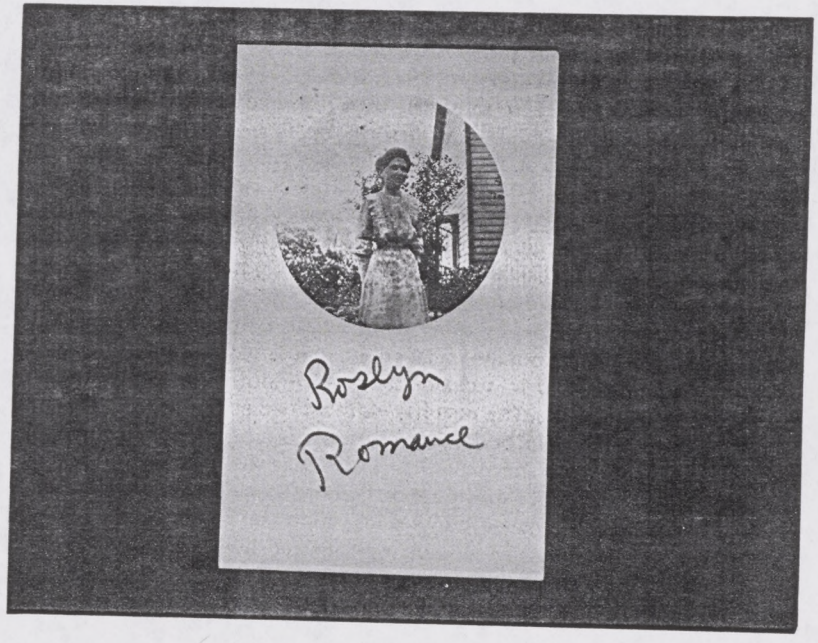
Bruce Baillie's *Roslyn Romance* begins with an object that ultimately serves as the organizing metaphor for the film itself. A hand enters the frame and writes the main title beneath a sepia photograph occupying a portion of a postcard. Additional antique postcards are fanned, shuffled and bared until the hand locates the palimpset containing the subordinate title, "Is it really true?", a phrase overlaying the original inscription of 1905 in the dark ink of a modern pen. Like a postcard from a friend visiting a foreign city, the film documents a sojourn at a place, and to typify that place, a single dominant image is selected. Here, the place is the rural town of Roslyn in the State of Washington, and the image, a pastoral one—the cluster of trees visible through the window of the filmmaker's residence. Just as a postcard always constitutes proof of an absence, of a physical gulf between writer and receiver, the film, too, is elegiac, its images proclaiming a sense of remoteness and loss. Although the imagery is relatively uniform and the structure quite lucid, a dense network of parallels and a diversity of themes belie this apparent simplicity.

The work is clearly in two parts, the division indicated by a prolonged fade which heralds the shift from autumn to winter. Punctuating the film at intervals, a series of subtitles in the form of entries in a diary invoke entities coincident with the visual and aural material. The majority of these meditations are dated and chronologically ascend from September of 1971 to late November of the same year. As an index of seasonal fluctuations, the trees outside attest to a similar temporal progression. At first verdant and in full bloom, by the end of the film, the branches are encrusted with snow.

The trees are introduced with an ironic gesture: a single leaf flutters in the filmmaker's hand, its shadow rippling over the surface of a postcard. The function of this moment as a prophetic parody of the film's most salient strategy, the superimposition of leaves over photographic portraits, is underlined when the manipulated leaf merges with other foliage in a dissolve. This foliage, in turn, dissolves to a close-up of a gravestone and the first of the subtitles appears, as if Baillie's meditation were a translation of the memorial chiseled onto the monument: "I had a yearning, a sadness to be with those who are never so far

from death, Roslyn 9-18-71." With these words, a central parallel is announced, that between the year nearing its close and the old people who populate the town. The sound track at various points records a conversation between Baillie and an old woman in a kitchen, while in the autumn section of the film the only people glimpsed have attained advanced years. The one exception is a very brief shot of the filmmaker, this conjunction of the filmmaker and the aged inhabitants suggesting that Baillie is contemplating what he may consider to be his own imminent death. On the other hand, the first actual images in the winter section are of children sledding and bouncing in the snow. However, the children are pictured either in extreme long shot or in slow motion, lending an effect of unreality, distance, and removal from the experiences of childhood. The eerie music accompanying these shots further stresses the sunder between the filmmaker and the ecstasies of youth.

From the children, Baillie returns to the branches and begins his most sustained presentation of another alien image, the antiquated photographs from a family album. In the first part of the film, the portraits had been interspersed with the contemporary shots of the old men and women. Now they follow each other in unbroken sequence, usually buried under and partially obscured by the superimposed branches whose occasional leaves peep through a layer of snow. The inclusion of a comically old-fashioned icon of Jesus of the Sacred Heart defines the vision of the stages of a structured life as the



Roslyn Romance

seasonal equinoxes and solstices mark the stages of a year. The first of the sacraments is commemorated with a baby extended for baptism by a monk's arm. The ensuing still is of a little girl dressed for her first holy communion; a later photograph depicts a woman as a bride.

The quiescent immobility of the subjects' poses abetted by the fluid manner in which the photographs slowly fade from beneath the leaves contributes to the erection of a myth of a forgotten era of serenity. It is the bucolic haven of Roslyn with, as a title notes, its "shooting leaves. . . . the old north wind blowing outside. . . . ladies canning fruit" which seems to call forth a consideration of objects from the past. The photographs which include generational gatherings, couples, parents and their children, like the postcards, whose messages are either from or directed to "mother," are testimonials to strong familial or community bonds. Similarly, the old woman on the sound track voices maternal concern for the filmmaker's eating habits and recounts the problems of a neighbor. In comparison to the photographs which commemorate significant people and the turning points in life, such as receipt of the sacraments, the film itself is a memorial to the sensations of peace and the communal sentiments aroused in the filmmaker at Roslyn. The final sequence asserts the relationship of the film to the photographs and postcards. The last title materializes: "Of what I see, like postcards to a dear aunt. A monument. An illumination. An attempt to reach a lost friend." The words are gone before the hand once again emerges and places two snapshots and the back of an unused postcard on a black surface. On the postcard, the hand pens the words, "For my mother."

The filmmaker, however, does not envision himself as unequivocally belonging to this pastoral milieu and the nostalgic past. As a denizen of the predominantly urban present, saturated with technology, his familiarity with and acclimatization to the more modern forms of life are subtly manifested in a variety of ways. The sound of the wind periodically whistling over the images is ultimately transformed into the drone of an airplane. He writes the dedication and the title in the obtrusive, thick, 'industrial' lines of a flair pen. A false note is injected into the whole enterprise by the self-parody involved in the manipulation of the leaf. Finally, Baillie has inscribed his own inability to successfully imitate the modes of representation of the past. Three attempts are made to mimic the still photographs by using color freeze frames. Successively, they diverge more and more from the melancholic repose of the sepia stills. The first shows an old man seated in a chair, static and restful, in the manner of the figures in the photographs. The next has more immediacy in that it presents the old man with an old woman, both in a precarious posture, caught in the midst of a gesture as she bends to shave him. The last, unlike the previous two, consists of a freeze in the middle of a moving shot. Enroute to the chopping block with a bundle of wood, the filmmaker bungles his action and raises his axe in salute, the image freezing as he smiles seemingly amused by his awkwardness with these rustic materials.

In the end, the film is indeed like a postcard—it is only a record of the feelings evoked by a visit to a place and not a testament to its maker's utter submergence in a complete style of existence.

The Forms Of Repetition: Larry Gottheim's Four Shadows

RICHARD BARTONE

Four Shadows is Larry Gottheim's latest investigation into the complexity and multiplicty of aural and visual image relationships. The film's form is derived from a simple structuring principle: repetition. The simplicity of the film's overall shape, easily discernable at an early point, is shattered by the varied interaction and juxtaposition of aural and visual images, provoking multiple associations. The process of repetition engages and activates the viewer's perceptual abilities in a very subtle and distinct manner.

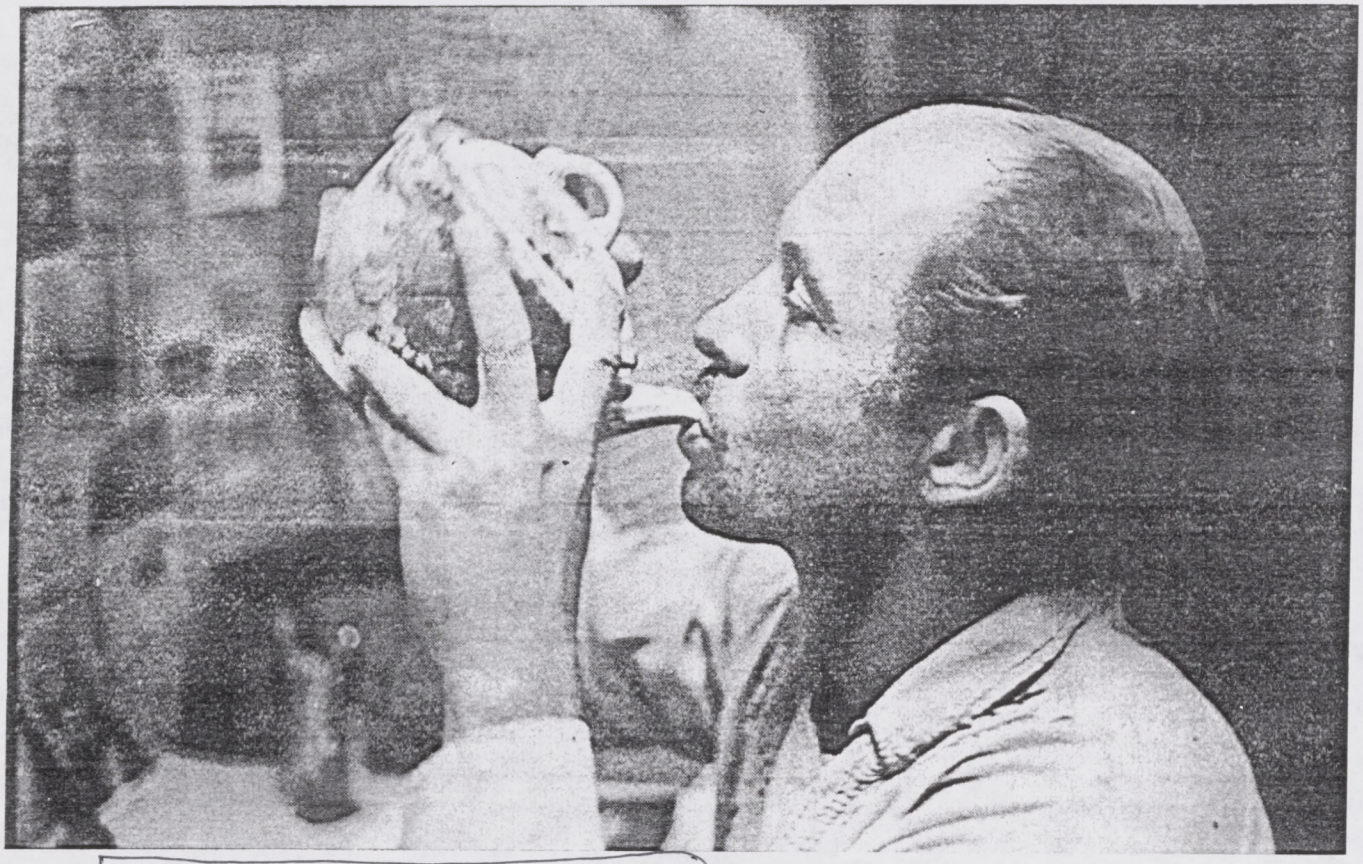
Four Shadows consists of four, four-minute segments of visual images and sound material except for the opera passage, "which is a few seconds longer and therefore begins in darkness." Gottheim notes the film's structure:

> "The sequence of image sections (summer, fall, winter, spring) is exactly repeated four times, each time united with the same four blocks of sound material, exactly repeated, but in a different order. The sixteen sections of the film display all the different combinations of sound and image material. The sound and image sections were all composed to allow for this isomorphism."[1]

The images of summer consist of long shots, sometimes with a long lens or a distorting prism lens, of two surveyors mapping coordinates in a field. A four-minute close-up of an opened book follows with a few autumn leaves protruding into the right side of the frame. The page contains a photograph of Cezanne's "View of the Hermitage at Pontoise", which is turned part-way through the shot by a hand to reveal a diagram of Cezanne's famous "Mardi Gras", sketched by Erle Loran, the author of the book *Cezanne's Composition*. Shots of a factory building, its parking area, a water tank and a railroad running adjacent to the parking area comprise the winter material. Several cars and children are seen, and two men cross over the railroad tracks to a diner we assume to be in close proximity to the factory area. Images of Siamang gibbons in cages at the National Zoo make up the final visual segment.

An Interview with Bruce Baillie

by Scott MacDonald



In the world of film studies, c
suspicion of beautiful imager
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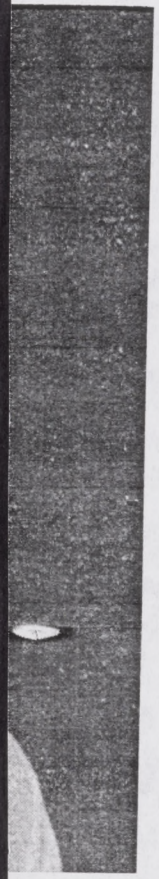

In the world of film studies, one often senses a suspicion of beautiful imagery, a suspicion based on the assumption that the apparatus of the movie camera is so constructed that it produces beautiful images almost automatically. Bruce Baillie's films are full of beautiful imagery, but they are anything but "eye candy." For Baillie, the filmstrip is a space where the physical world around him and the spiritual world within him can intersect; the screenng room is a place where cinema devotees can share moments of illumination. The remarkable textures and colors of Baillie's films are not the products of a movie camera doing what it does automatically; they are achieved by means of homespun technologies Baillie devises to modify the camera so that it can be true to what his inner vision reveals to him, rather than to conventional visual and narrative expectations.

In his earliest films, Baillie explored ways of visualizing his own mental states and of capturing something of the lovely simplicity of the people around him he saw as most deeply spiritual. Increasingly, his films became characterized by a tendency to layer or combine multiple images and by an unusual sensitivity to texture, color, and light. Each of these tendencies can be understood as an emblem of a particular understanding Baillie had developed. The layering and combining of imagery—most memorable, perhaps, in *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964), *Tung* (1966), and *Castro Street* (1966)—became a way of expressing the complexity of experience, the discovery that reality is not simply a set of surfaces available to perception and intelligence, but a composite of surface and of spirit that flows beneath the surface and behind our perception of it. Baillie's dexterity in capturing the sensuous textures of the world—particularly notable in *Valentin de las Sierras* (1968), *Quick Billy* (1970) and the recent video *The P-38 Pilot* (1990)—is an emblem of the degree to which he sees the perceivable world as invigorated by spirit. And his fascination with color and light in such films as *Still Life* (1966), *Quick Billy* and *Roslyn Romance* (1977) is a function of his desire for spiritual enlightenment; it connects his work with that of such predecessors and contemporaries as Oskar Fischinger, Jordan Belson, James Whitney, Stan Brakhage and Tom Chomont, who have used film as a way of visualizing the colors of the soul on its journey toward spiritual regeneration.

For Baillie, the very idea of making his films is so out of synch with the mainstream history of film and the commoditized world it reflects and reconfirms that it renders him an anomaly, an outcast, a "pure fool" like Parsifal and Don Quixote. Indeed, modern society is encoded in the very tools a filmmaker must work with. Achieving the spiritual by means of filmmaking simply "can't be done"—and *therefore* is worth doing as a means of demonstrating the reality of the spirit. In *To Parsifal, Mass for the Dakota Sioux, Quixote*, and other films, Ballie becomes the spiritual knight-errant not only in terms of what he trains his camera on and how he uses it, but by being willing to enter the field and make films at all.

His refusal to betray his cine-spiritual quest, despite the resistance that surrounded him, became a demonstration of the spiritual integrity of his work. Throughout the 1960s, Baillie functioned as both film artist and as organizer. He was the catalyst for the Canyon Cinema exhibition programs that finally resulted in Canyon Cinema distribution, now the most successful distributor of a wide range of critical forms of cinema.

I spoke with Baillie in June 1989 at his home on Camano Island in Washington State.

SM: How did you get started?
BB: What led me toward making films in the beginning, in 1960 or even a little before, was an interest in theater and the need to function in the world through art. When I was a kid, in 6th or 7th grade in Aberdeen, South Dakota, we messed up one time and the principal's punishment was that we had to give a play for an assembly. At first, we thought this was a severe penalty, but pretty soon we liked the idea. Later, we asked him, could we give a play every assembly; we had formed a little theater group called "The Acme Co." I stayed involved with theater all thorugh high school and into college (and I refer to it in the introduction to *Quick Billy*, Part IV). Then when I was alone, I thought, well, now that I'm without all these guys, I'll do it on the big screen. I went to the University of Minnesota. A professor there recommended I go to the London School of Film Technique, which was just starting: it was a small operation and they didn't have much equipment, but there were several very good teachers.

SM: This is when?
BB: 1958 or 1959. We were an international group of university graduates, ambitious, impatient and mostly poor, except for the Arabs, who lived in Chelsey hotels and who had numerous English and German girlfriends. We couldn't do much there and were very discouraged. I was sick: the London fog and the poor food made me weak. So I just left in the middle of the term. I went down to Yugoslavia, where I remember seeing a sculpture by the most well-known Yugoslavian sculptor: a relief depicting the cycle of life circling a traditional well in the Astro-Hungarian center of Zagreb, where people came for water and to meet each other and gossip. I thought, "This relief is at the source; it's an essential part of everyday life." I liked that, and decided I wanted to do something similar with film.

I came back and thought, "Well, I'll just figure out how to make films." By then I was in San Francisco. I tried to figure out how sound got onto film. I counldn't. There weren't any manuals on it. And nobody cound tell me! Finally, I met Marvin Becker who was making travel and educational films. He was a real expert in 16mm (35mm, too) and had a big studio in San Francisco. He'd hire a few freelance people for big jobs. I told him, "I'll work eight hours a day, for as long as my unemployment lasts—three more months—and without salary." So he says, "Well, you can't beat that! When can you start?" I parked my '49 Chevy under the Bay Bridge every day, after the long drive from Canyon, where I lived with Kikuko Kawasaki, who was one of my real mentors and a dearly beloved. I got the Chevy from a wrecker for $25; it had to have its brake fluid refilled for every crossing of the bridge!

Marvin started me out rolling up sound film outs that were lying all over the studio. I'd play them through a little sound reader and label them with a grease pencil. So I got acquainted with how film feels and how it works. Later, a free-lance editor was splicing the track for a film for the Horseless Carriage Clubs, and I hung around behind him and saw how he organized footage, cut and spliced it with Mylar tape. Then I got to go out and shoot with another man, from Bechtel Associates, as his assistant; I took a few shots with his Bell & Howell which he was able to use. And then I started making a film with my dogs and my dear frend, Miss Wong. I remember Mr. McKinney at Multichrome Lab, on Gough Street, helping me out during this time—later his son, "Mac," took over the lab and was a friend to many of us.

SM: Was the film with the dogs and Miss Wong *On Sundays* (1961)?
BB: *On Sundays*—a typical early '60s film where someone gets chased and you go through old buildings and all that.

SM: There are some nice moments in that film.
BB: Oh, there might be, I can't tell you how hard it was

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for me to edit. I had started to learn cinematography—that was hard enough. I had never used a still camera in my life before I picked up the Bolex, but after I was getting used to it, I tried editing and couldn't manage it. So I just hung around the studio and kept practicing. I would take a scene with the dogs and I would cut it one way, then another. It took me forever to develop a little bit of freedom. For quite some time, I was like a gymnast without any grace.

The issue of poverty and art was very important then, and it has always been of special interest to me. I had a friend in Berkeley, a very fine commercial artist, Jeff Belcher. He lived in an attic: everybody was living in somebody's shed, or in an attic or in the back of a car—a lot of skilled people. I don't know how it is now, in the worked at large, or among American intellectuals and poets; but then there were *many* people with skill and sensitivity but no place to live and no plce to apply their gifts. Jeff was the only guy I knew at that time who had tried cinema, and when I announced to him that I was going to try it, he said, "No, don't! You cannot make films by yourself, becase one person can't do that many jobs, learn that many skills, alone, and without an income, and without a place to live. And where would you find the equipment and the materials? None of it's available to you. Never will be. You can't afford it, never will be able to. Don't do it, I don't want to see you broken!" Well, I had a lot of strength then, and I decided that was how I was going to use it. Later, I invited him to my first show.

I was discovering the principles of working. I would see myself going over the Oakland-San Francisco Bridge on the mission of the day like a knight. I wasn't 20, I was 30 and headed toward 40, mature enough to learn, and to move toward consciousness at last. One of the many things I discovered was that what my friend had said in the very beginning was obviously true, and that as a result, there were not many of us trying to do ths, and very few who understood that attempt. For me it was close to a 100% effort. It was like war.

For me, poverty was really the mother or the sister of our craft and of our lives. Often I think, our aesthetic came from Sister Poverty, as St. Francis used to say. Ron Rice was a good example of a poor guy, dead poor. He used machine-gun-camera film that half the time wouldn't respond to the lab developer. I remember him coming through town in the early Canyon days with two beautiful ladies. He found some back room in Berkeley with his two lovely friends. We were curious about the relationships, naturally, but we never asked him. He was kind of a severe guy, I thought. He was on his way to Mexico, and as you know, he never returned. He was working on a film, had it hanging up with the women's underwear on strings across their borrowed room.

I find that when we [Baillie and Lorie, his Filipina wife] go to the Philippines, we in some ways find the spirit we had at Canyon Cinema in the '60s. The key was, and is, *simplicity*. At Canyon we recognized that one of the essential ingredients was necessity, and that to be heard you have to be needed. When we're in Lorie's village in Bobol, anything we can offer is needed. In a Philippine village, there's no such thing as Mom and Dad who live in a middle class house, commute to work, and love their children, and when their child has a birthday, they have a little birthday party. In a village, everyone's a brother or sister or a cousin, and all children are mine and my children are yours, and when they have a birthday, there's plenty of time because nobody's commuting and we're all unemployed. We had a dance last night for somebody who got married and today the daughter is having her fifth birthday and people cry and laugh and there's music and cake and all kinds of stuff is happening. Christmas takes two months! That was film art for ten years in America. We needed each other and enjoyed the process, regardless of its difficulties. It was hungry people making cookies all day!

SM: How did Canyon get started?
BB: We started Canyon Cinema about 1960, in Canyon, California, over the hills from Oakland and Berkeley. I was living with Kikuko Kawasaki. She was paying the rent and giving me the chance to free up my time to make films. Immediately, I realized that making films and showing films must go hand in hand, so I got a job at Safeway, took out a loan and bought a projector. We got an army surplus screen and hung it up real nice in the backyard of this house we were renting. Then we'd find whatever films we could, including our own little things that were in progress—"we," there wasn't really any we, just myself for awhile—and show them.

So I make a *thing* of it. I had no occupation. I couldn't get a job anywhere. so, I thought, I'll invent my own occupation. I set up a little part of the house as an office, I had to call it something: I put up a little sign, and it turned out ot be "Canyon Cinema" with a lightbulb next to it. Fairly soon, we had weekly showings. Kikuko made popcorn. The kids around the neighborhood gathered the community benches and chairs, and we'd sit under the trees in the the summer with all the dogs and people and watch French or Canadian Embassy films and National Film Board of Canada stuff, along with our films. I let it be known immediately that I had a place to show films, if any filmmakers were coming through town. I let Jonas [Mekas] know right away. At first we were in touch with only Larry Jordan, and later, Jordan Belson.

Stan Brakhage came to town after awhile and tried to make a home in San Francisco with Jane. And other filmmakers were scattered here and there; we didn't really see each other very much. There weren't many films to show, but toward 1962 it began to build up rapidly. We'd send out postcards, and soon the mailing list was too long. Then Chickie Strand was in town, at Berkeley, and we got together and ran Canyon together. There were a few other people around: her husband, Paul Strand, took care of the screen and the Volkswagen bus, and later Emery Menefee joined us. Chickie was working at the University, and we would show in Berkeley at various places, whatever was available. By then we were showing our newsreel and everything else we could find: Brakhage's films, and Mekas's . . .

SM: There was a generation of Bay Area filmmakers in the late 1940s: Peterson and Broughton . . .
BB: We would order those films from the Audio Film Center catalogue and show them. James Broughton was a kind of father figure. He didn't come around much, but we knew he was in the area. We'd show all his films. Marie Menken, Sydney Peterson, Maya Deren, Frank Stauffacher—we'd have a festival once in a while. Later, we showed in North Beach in San Francisco, in the late Beatnik era. So we were pretty busy, putting up signs everywhere, keeping our equipment in shape, and renting films and trying to pay for them, shipping them, returning chairs to the mortuaries, sending announcements to the paper, which they'd *never* print. Nobody would ever write anything about us. But the Berkeley police would come constantly and run us out, right at the last minute, as a fire hazard or something.

SM: Why?
BB: I don't know. This was in pre-revolution times. Berkeley was quite conservative in the early Sixties. They just didn't like the spirit of it. We'd have the Finnish Hall as a back-up and a bunch of Volkswagen buses out front (Paul Strand in charge). The police would come and tell us to leave, and we'd say, "OK," and everybody would get on the bus, go to the next place, and we'd set up again. It was like von Richthofen's Flying Circus. We got really adept at setting up a nice theater anywhere. It was never sloppy. We taught all the people who would come to work for us—volunteers—to set everything up precisely, the right way. We had a good projector and good programs, and we tried to pay attention to the timing of the interludes between films.

SM: How many people came to screenings?
BB: At the University of California, or nearby, we'd always have for 25 to 70 people. I'd guess the average was 35 to 45. Over in North Beach, there might be 20 people. We showed all over the Bay Area. We were very concerned about the tone of the events.

SM: What tone were you looking for?
BB: We wanted a nice "family mood." We knew we were going to show things that were likely to upset people's expectations. They were prepared for the conventions of a literary kind of movie, *real movies*, and they weren't going to be seeing much of that. So we wanted to be kind to them. Mainly, we wanted them to relax.

Choosing programs, however, was like making films: we didn't take audience preference into consideration. Our decisions were totally personal and aesthetic. Putting a program together is like making art. It's one of the few places where a person can function without damage to others, with personal power, self-centeredness, ego, whatever—their own Vision. Our theater was like that. During the teas ceremony in the old Japan, nobody would ever ask could you bring out the *other* scroll, please? [laughter]. Or could we maybe have some *other* tea? No, you'd come and there it was, and because the master of the ceremony, the master of ceremonies, is a particular person, with all the limitations of being particular, he would do it his/her way. And as a result, this particular ceremony would have as well a universal touch.

Teaching for me should be done the same way. If a student approaches me, implicitly assuming that I should be concerned with the same politics she is, or he is—whatever fashionable dogma—I always fade out immediately. That's not education. I don't like to please students and I don't like to please audiences. If I did, I'd make Coke ads or porn films, and right now we'd have a fat income. College students are so fashion conscious. These days, they're very concerned about how you're supposed to treat each other, "correct politics." I've always taken to the Zen way, where you make a big joke of what everybody thinks is serious and you're very serious about what everybody thinks is not. You mix it all together and throw it out backwards. It stays new that way.

SM: What else do you remember about the early Canyon days?
BB: After we moved over the hill from Canyon to Berkeley, we were a small, impoverished, but very alive collective, a few people who put together some equipment that other people cound borrow (and that we could use to make our own films). We came up with *The News*, the Canyon Cinema newsreel. It was like in the old days at the movies when they had a feafure and a cartoon and a serial—and a newsreel. We used outdated, reversal, black and white 16mm film. Ernest Callenbach [now retired editor at University of California Press and of *Film Quarterly*; author of *Ectopia* (New York: Bantham, 1975)] had a little house in back of his place that we used. We couldn't mix sound at that point, so we made wild sound and used a 1/4" tape recorder. The news itself would sometimes be the guys laying some pipe somewhere, mundane information, or it might be a totally cinematic piece. When new people came through, we'd tell them, "Don't feel obliged, but if you want to make a newsreel, just make whatever you want to make, and we'll call it "The News!"

SM: *Mr. Hayashi* was a "news item," right?
BB: Yes.

SM: How long did you do the filmed newsreel?
BB: Maybe two years—it gradually merged with/into our personal filmmaking. A little later, Chick Callenbach invented the written and printed *Canyon Cinemanews*.

SM: When did distribution begin? And who was involved?

BB: First, there was a woman who ran it over in Sausalito, whose name unfortunately eludes me. And Bob Nelson ran it for awhile. And Bruce Conner, Larry Jordan, Edith Kramer. It took me a long time to back out of it. So much was dependent on the manager.

SM: What do you think are your strongest films?
BB: Well, *Castro Street*, *All My Life*, *Quixote*, *Quick Billy*, and even though *Mr. Hayashi* is a very crude film, I like it because of the person in it. I like *To Parsifal*. It's a little awkward, but mostly good. And *Mass*. I suppose that's it . . . oh gee, I like *Roslyn Romance* quite a bit, the Introduction especially. And *Valentin of the Mountains* [*Valentin de las Sierras*] I like very much. My new video, *The P-38 Pilot*, I like very much.

An odd thing about filmmaking is that you don't practice like a pianist; you make a film every time. So a lot of the fims were practice.

SM: About *On Sundays*. That first film was not a conventional narrative, but it has a lot of conventional narrative elements. The next two—*The Gymnasts* (1961) and *Have You Thought of Talking to the Director?* (1962)—are a little different: they're both narratives, but the story seems only a pretext for a trip into a mental state. There's a development from learning how to tell a story to learning how to externalize what you're thinking or feeling. Could you talk about those early developments?
BB: Hard to recall. Generally, each film showed me what *it* wanted, as the Eskimo carvers say. I was slowly coming to understand more about my medium. I do recall deciding to proceed slowly with this huge task and to proceed in a conventional way, meanwhile looking around and seeing others going off into modern art and expressing themselves in their own unique ways. I simply couldn't at first.

I was just pushing on to uncover hidden ground. Looking back on that time, I think of a Japanese garden with all the neatly laid stones you walk along that emulate the randomness of nature and yet have the exactness of the Creator's mind. I look back and see that each step, each stone, was something I laid of necessity, my own necessity, the necessity to know myself. I would make each film as it came along, I'd smell it in the air when the time had come again to make another one.

I remember more clearly what started me to work on the later films. In *Castro Street* it was the color quality of the Standard Oil tanks in Richmond, California, on a particular rainy day. For *All My Life*, it was the quality of the light for three summer days in Casper, California, up the coast where Tulley lived. It looks like Cork, Ireland—used to. The "manager" class, as usual, invaded that lovely little place and neutralized it. But it was a beautiful place for awhile. There were three days: the peak day was the first day I noticed the light. I had this outdated Ansco film I wanted to use. But I didn't want to make a film. By that time, I knew the toll making a film can take. But the second day the light was still marvelous. A friend was with me, and we started to drive back to San Francisco, and suddenly I said, "No, I can *not* turn my back on this!" We stopped, and I got the tripod, fixed it real solid. Then I practiced and had her call off the minutes: we had about three minutes to get up into the sky in one roll, one continuous shot. Then we shot it and it went as smoothly as possible—I panned with the 3" telephoto lens, and pulled focus as I panned. *All My Life* came out well. It was inspired by the light (every day is unique as you know), and by the early Teddy Wilson/Ella Fitzgerald recording ["All My Life"], which was always playing in Tulley's little cabin, with its condemnation sign on it (one evening, we were having supper and heard "tack tack." We went out and looked at the door. The sign said, "You are required to leave these premises by 12 o'clock tomorrow!"). I knew that song had to be the track and that it had to have the same sound it had at Paul's, with a

potato sack over the speaker. It's supposed to sound a little scratchy. When I got back to the commune, I put the music and the image together.

SM: When I was looking at your films chronologically and came to *To Parsifal*, it seemed as though you had reached a point where it was enough just to look at something gorgeous in the world. It was as though you had realized, "Oh, this can be a film. I don't need to put this *into* anything else."
BB: I remember the exact process of making that film. That was probably the first film where I felt I was starting to get a hold of the medium. There are some awkwardnesses, especially a few still cuts between trees, that remain disturbing to me, but for the most part it's a pretty interesting tribute to Wagner and the myth of the Holy Grail and the Parsifalian hero.

I was out on a fishing boat, and I knew a new film was cooking in me and that it was spring and a tribute to the loveliness of spring was coming, and I heard this music on the boat and had my camera. Willard Morrison of Audio Film Center, in San Francisco, had given me the first reels of new color film I ever had, about seven reels of the old Ektachrome—so beautiful.. ASA 15 or 16. It was like liquid gold in my camera. Like golden bullets. I had a couple rolls of that with me, so I listened to the music coming in over a little speaker up on the mast as we rolled along in the Pacific Ocean off the Golden Gate—we were very low to the ocean because of the way the boat was designed—and you coud really feel the sea. I just shot it the way it was. Then I thought, "Well, what's this music: it's got to go in there, and it was "Parsifal" by Richard Wagner. I didn't know anything about him or his music at the time, though I was familiar with the Grail legend. So it all mixed together—the magic sword and the wound given Amfortas, the result of his own indiscretions or imperfections. Ironically, I was later on to be given the *Amfortas* wound [Baillie suffered from hepatitis in 1967 and continues to feel its effects].

You're given a certain responsibility and a gift or grace, a certain unique capability, which can turn against you if it's not attended to properly. Even the king who possessed this emblem of purity or perfection, this divine weapon, was heir to temptation, and the weapon fell into the hands of his nemesis. The wound was ultimately mortal. Though he was still alive, still functiong, he was incapable of carrying on this essential mission to celebrate Infinte Truth, embodied in the Holy Grail, so it was fortold that there would be a successor who would come along, a "pure fool" as Wagner called him—whether the original neme was Parsifal of Percivil, it really meant, at least to him, "pure fool."

SM: So you saw yourself as cinema's Parsifal?
BB: Parsifal was object and subject all at once, an objectified depiction *and* a reflection of my subjective pursuit for an identity, my recognition of myself. To try to make *my* own films against enormous resistance was perhaps Parsifal-ian: to be out there in the woods and on the ocean with a movie camera, unemployed, not doing the usual things—marrying, making children, setting up the pension plan, carrying the mail. The first part was shot off of Steve Brenner's boat. We hear the sounds of the VHF radio and the fishermen talking to each other, early morning. Sort of beautiful, isn't it? And then up in the cliffs the wind was blowing through those grasses that grow along the Northern California coast.

SM: That gorgeous shot of the wind in the grasses is a motif all through your work and apparently your life—even your child [Baillie had a baby girl in March 1989] is named Wind.
BB: Horses, the grasses blowing in the wind, the sea, the flesh of young girls' faces, edges of bodies, movement . . . those are my motifs.

SM: You know, it's very hard to verbalize about your work.
BB: But it's kind of fun, isn't it, to verbalize around things,

because each person gets a chance to see for him/herself! *Parsifal* isn't closed down like a Coke ad. It gives a lot of room to the viewer. I think there are lovers of the medium who are more amorous perhaps than some of the filmmakers. I like to make analogies between filmmaker and man of arms. For one thing, the man of arms becomes so much *of* his/her weaponry that he can become inured to that pure love, which is his/her source.

SM: The hero of *Mass* is the guy on the motorcycle—his "noble steed"—which on one level is distinct from the tract houses he passes and what they seem to mean; but on another level the motorcycle is part of the same consumer culture. The people coming to take care of the guy lying in the street is a parable of taking action within a society where the tendency is to ignore the suffering of others.
BB: *Mass* is a requiem, conceived on the occasion of President Kennedy's murder. A sad time for many people. I had just come back from a long lonely trip to where I'd been born in the Dakotas. I don't remember if I shot anything on that trip—I think not—but I knew I was into a film. One night after I was back I stayed up all night—one of those rare times when I stay up all night—and listened to the requiem masses being played on the radio, especially Mozart's. It was so beautiful. You know, Celtic people love to weep over the beauty of things. One of the many really nice ways to respond to the world is through sadness. It's very deeply rooted in me, and maybe you, too. The requiem mass is a non-Celtic way of celebrating death joyfully. So I knew I was making a mass, but again it was new information for me. I'll run into Catholics who think I'm a Catholic. But I only studied the mass for the short time in order to do my work, and then I forgot it. I have almost no data stored in my brain. My life and my art are entirely "non-informative, irrelevant."

The film has a very strong critical thesis: it's *against* contemporary society, buildings, pollution—all the rest of it; and it's *for* the at least an implied joy of nature and selfhood and being human!

SM: *Mass* is full of layered imagery, superimpositions. That's a stylistic way of expressing the fact that things are more complex than they first seemed to you. As your films develop in the years after *Mass*, layering becomes more and more important, even characteristic.
BB: Perhaps.

We can't leave out of this discussion of *Mass* the tribute to the American aborigine, the original people who were condidered by the celebrants of the Holy Mass to be heathenish savages. The hero in the film was a tribute to the native people of Dakota, the Lakota Sioux in general and all their tribes, and it was a tribute to the best of man who lies on the sidewalk, dead already at the beginning of the film and hauled off later by the celebrants: the body of Everyman taken away in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It was also a tritute to *the poet* (and coincidentally, to Jean Cocteau). I portrayed the gift of poetry as deceased, gone. The film is a celebration of what has passed away from our hysterical milieu of materialism and technological redneckery!

SM: Though paradoxically it hasn't passed away because you're making film poetry.
BB: Right. I am that very person, or if it isn't me, it's others. I'm making this film and portraying myself, betraying myself, uncovering the self, expressing Every Person's dilemma.

SM: At times, *Mass* has a strange sheen to it, especially on the bridge . . .
BB: I did a couple thing to get that. A lot of times I used a green filter in the summer sun. It gave an odd flatness to a pretty good, contrasty reversal film. And then I put Vaseline on my clear filter for the diffusion. A lot of times I would shoot and wind back and shoot again—as people did in those days—making double images *in* the camera,

taking what happened and declaring that another clue to what was developing, discovering the film as I went.

SM: *Quixote* was the biggest film you'd done up to that point and still is, except for *Quick Billy* and *Roslyn Romance* (if one counts all the sections of those two films). In many ways, it's an extension of *Mass*.
BB: I was living with my folks. I never could afford my own room or anything, and by this time my father was saying, "You're getting to be 30-whatever and you're doing these films, and you're getting nowhere. You just can't live here anymore." I had to quit in the middle of *Mass* about three times 'cause I had no place to house it. I was always living in someone's back room, where I couldn't work. Finally, I went home to my folks' house where the film was, and walked quietly back into my room and went back to work on the *Mass*, no one said anything, and I finished it.

All these critical personal issues were hitting me. Where was all this going? How long could I keep it up? I don't know when I first got a grant, but I remember I couldn't go another inch. I'd got myself way in debt. No income. I didn't have any equipment, and I had all this work to do. And then my friend Ramon Sender from the San Francisco Tape Music Center told me a fellow from the Rockefeller Foundation was coming out to find western artists, possibly to give them grants. I got to talk to him, and he looked at my work.

A little while later, I was on my way to Eugene, Oregon to give a show, and the Volkswagen broke down. I put a pin in it somewhere and got a little further down the road to a phone, and I called this Rockefeller guy and said, "What about the grant? Can you do it or not, because I'm either going to quit right now or push ahead; it depends on what you say right now, because my car's broken down, I'm in debt, I can't go any further." And he said, "Yeah, we're going to give you a grant." And I said, "Well, can I pay my dabts off?" He said, "No, you can't use a grant that way. You have to spend it on your films." And I thought for a minute and said, "Well, that's OK." Because when it came, that's what I did: I payed all my debts, and bought a little equipment. So I was able to push ahead through the middle 1960s and get *All My Life* finished and *Still Life*, *Castro Street*, *Valentin*, and *Tung*—some of my very nicest films.

But *Quixote* was before all this, when poverty was really facing me.

The first phase was the Southwest. I went with a friend of mine form Kowloon, named Tseng Ching. She was a wonderful girl who'd finished college, and her visa was almost up. She gave me $200 that her uncle had given her. I've never fotten over that. I told her "Absolutely not!' when she offered it; I couldn't believe it, and as time went on, I couldn't raise a penny. So I took her money and she came with me, and my dog—MamaDog—a big shepherd. I was reading *Don Quixote* as I went. I was aware of the structure of Cervantes's work; the transitions, in particular, were important to me. Also, I'd studied some of Vshr'd noyrd and his music and some of Brakhage's films and writings, and some e.e. cummings. But especially, Cervantes. I liked how he would get out of one chapter and into the next. There'd be the name of a chapter and then a subtitle would say, "Of what was said when on the road to . . ." Then there'd be sub-material indented with space around it where, say, the shepherd's song would be. I liked that shape. I knew I was going to have very unique, disparate materials that had to fit together, and it was going to be quite an assignment. I felt up to it 'cause I had made quite a few films now, and I wanted to make a long film with an interesting form. I wanted to show how in the conquest of our environment in the New World, Americans have isolated themselves from Nature and from each other. As you may remember, in the Southwest sequences I go way away from the town then film it from out among the cacti and cicadas.

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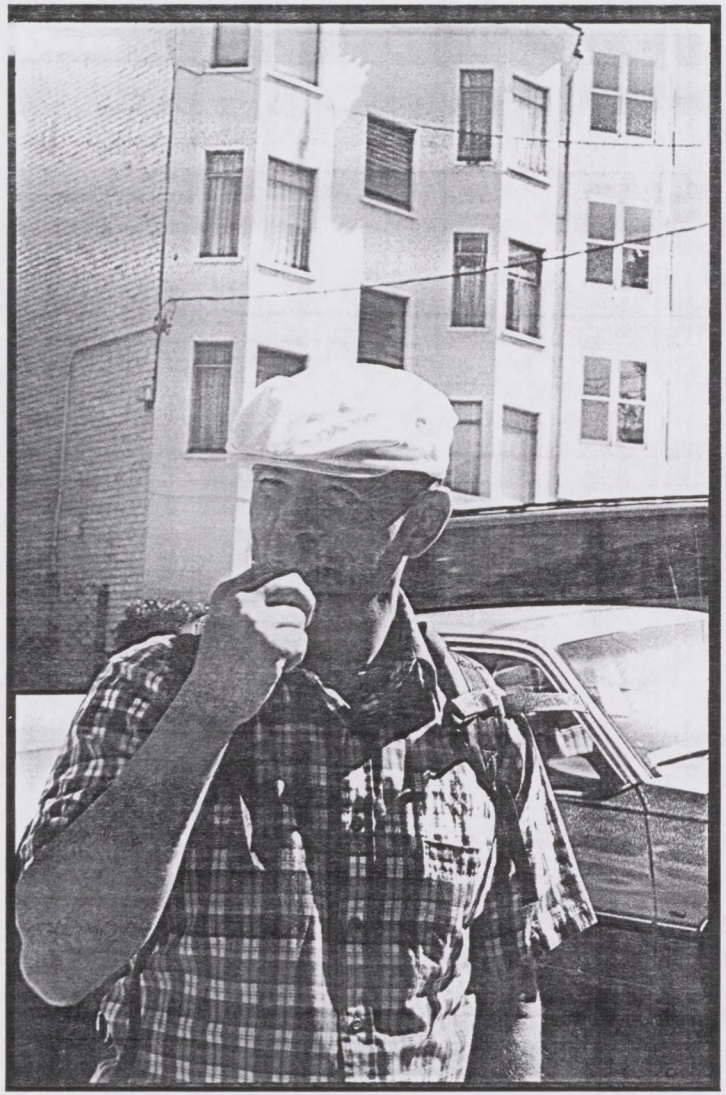
The passage about the pigs in South Dakota being herded around and the guys eating dinner was *not* supposed to be an obvious pun on "piggish eating," which would never have occurred to me. I never think of pigs in that common sese of "piggish" ... In Bohol, we share our minds with the pigs and the chickens, the birds and the snakes. A singular pleasure.

SM: You mean you wouldn't insult pigs by comparing them with those guys?
BB: Yeah. So I made a mistake there, because it's always taken that I fell into a cliche. For me, it was really just another one of many little devices in that movie to enforce the contradistinction between the guys back here in town, the City Fathers, doing whatever they do to perpetrate this characteristic defensive wall against Nature. Anyway, Tseng Ching and I went out and had some adventures, and I recorded a lot of it. We found an old schoolhouse out in Arizona somewhere, where there used to be trails for the stagecoaches and the cavalry, and I found an old out-of-tune piano that she played and I recorded—stuff like that.

Then Tseng Ching had to leave for China. I never saw her again. I went back to my folk's house for awhile and winter came and that's when I went over the mountains and started the black and white section, on $25 I borrowed from David Spellman in Aberdeen. I used film I had stolen in Hollywood: Tseng Ching and I had gone down to Hollywood before going to the Southwest and shot some film which I never used, and we found some stacks of that old film that Ron Rice used to use, in an alley in a big box. I immediately knew it was for me. We took it to the car and off we went. So I hit the road with that film and over the mountains from San Francisco it was winter. I'd almost forgotten! I arrived in my Volkswagen with a week battery, and it snowed and we were stuck in Nevada somewhere. The dog and I had to sleep together to survive! The next morning we ran into an Indian guy who was living with his pony in the basement of a hotel. He got a guy to come out and jump start us. There are so many stories in that film!

Technically speaking, I knew I wanted to have a more sophisticated way of combiining imagery, which would somehow be accomplished *after* the original shooting. And I decided this was going to be a long film for two projectors. I didn't like the simple effect of in-camera superimposition. That was just too elementary. I shot a long section in the hills of the San Bernardino Valley one foggy morning. We were camped out. Later, when I started editing, it was used as a separate piece to be projected alongside the other material. I practiced that for awhile, then I put it away. In the archives with the *Quixote* material are long segments that were made to go side by side with the material that's in the distribution version of the film. But in the end I didn't combine imagery that way. Instead, to make a combined image, I used blace Mylar tape. I'd lay stuff down side by side on a light table, and mask parts of the frame, so that later the frame would share two disparate scenes *without* the effect of superimposition. I had to do it manually because I didn't have access to optical printers. And a lot of that had to be taken off again, gradually, because it was a mess, but that's how some of those little effects were done. Lots of the material was put aside because it just wouldn't match up; a lot of segments weren't used.

Finally I got the car running better and went North. I wanted to go up toCutbank, Montana, 'cause they always had the coldest weather; I wanted to be there in the middle of winter. It was so cold that I broke the handle on my tripod while panning in a blizzard. It was crazy. I got up into the Indian reservations and then headed East. I wanted to do something in New York City, but Selma was happening, so I borrowed some money and flew to Selma from Ann Arbor. I was a day or two behind the terrible days of beatings that had sent me down there. I got what I could. Rev. King was there at the time.



Bruce Baillie, San Francisco, July 1992 (photo by D.S.)

SM: You had no sense at the beginning of the overall route you would take?
BB: I went wherever my knight errantry took me, like Don Quixote.

SM: It's like a feature-length newsreel. It seems to come out of *Mr. Hayashi* and the early Canyon newsreels.
BB: Yes.

SM: *Castro Street* uses still another method of combining imagery.
BB: *Castro Street* was created by a most horrendous effort of intellectualization and intuition combined, using the back and the front of the brain simultaneously, which blew my fuses for life. When I was editing *Castro Street*, I would come out of my morning editing session around noon to lie in the sun and eat, and people I lived with in the commue would pass by, and I couldn't recognize them. I didn't know who they were. I was like someone with Alzheimer's disease. I just blew my brains out every morning editing that film. Now, I try to dissuade my students from this kind of suicidal concentration!

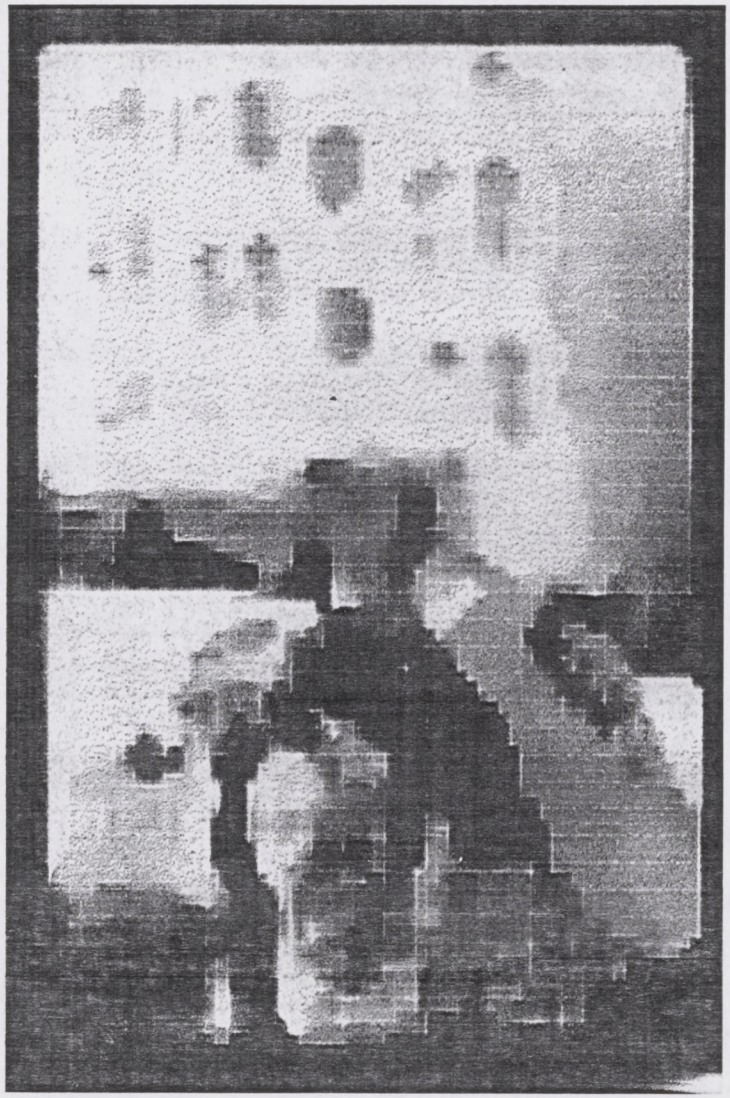
Technically, when I made *Castro Street*, I went into the field again with my "weapon," my tools. I collected a couple of prisms and a lot of glasses from my mom's kitchen, various things, and tried them all in the Berkeley backyard one day. I knew I wouldn't have access to a laboratory that would allow me to combine black and white and color, and I was determined to do it by myself. I went after the soft color on one side of Castro Street where the Standard Oil towers were; the other side was the black and white, the railroad seitching yards. I was making mattes by using high contrast black and white film that was used normally for making titles. I kept my mind available so that as much as one can know, I knew about the scene I had *just* shot when I made the *next* color shot. What was white would be black in my negative, and

that would allow me matte the reversal color so that the two layers would not be superimposed but combined.

I shot the railroad material in the shorter shots, as "masculine." The "feminine" was the longer, more continuous, simpler, steady color. So one side of the street was feminine for me; the other side masculine. I discovered that I had in my archives some music from Southern India that was based on that idea, and although I didn't particularly recognize why it was that way, I enjoyed the music, and I needed inspiration so I always played it while I edited. I wanted to visulize that ancient, universal fact of opposites which are one, both in conflict and harmony—opposing each other and abiding together *and* requiring one another.

SM: On one level it would seem strange to make a beautiful film about an industrial landscape, and yet, if you're combining opposites, it seems very logical. It's like taking the place where one might think there's nothing to look at, or at least nothing of a poetic sort, and then making the opposite thing from it. Your film is a kind of magic.

BB: That sounds good to me. At that time my work was recognized mostly as social criticism: the theme of modern systems as evil always seemed to be there. I remember thinking, "Well, I'm just dropping all that; I'm going to make a *film* film." And then I began to recognize the inner meaning of it. Naturally that *would be* the foundation of it, since it was clear to me always that my purpose in making each film was to find myself, and each film took me further, until finally I was beyond the necessity of making films. Originally, I showed *Castro Street* with stereo sound. I'd take a little Ampex speaker and amplifier along. We'd have the one optical track, and we'd play the magnetic B track on the tape recorder. That was the original plan. Then it got to be too much trouble, and it went around with only the monaural optical track.



Bruce Baillie (digital image by D.S.)

SM: Who was Tung?
BB: Well, she still is a close friend who lives in San Francisco. At the time, we were very close. I think it was one New Year's that I found myself in love with her again, feeling so much love for her. I remember sleeping on the floor in my room at my folks' house, waking with a momentary impression—that *was* an idea that preceded the images—and getting right up and making myself work before it was gone, to capture exactly what I had seen in just a half an instant. I'd trained myself for a lifetime to catch *some* of those instants—only only visualizations, but thought-stuff.

I remember my foks were going to church, and I went up on the roof of the house. I had a blue glass that I'd brought back from Japan, which I taped over my lens and did that lon pan around the house, diffusing and giving that purple-blue to everything, shooting the sun as though it were the moon. We shot the material of Tung herself out by the Berkeley horseracing track where there was nothing disturbing the horizon line. I shot at a low angle against the sky with black and white copy film, high contrast, so that if I used the negative as a reversal, the black sky would in effect be a matte with her against it. I shot her on roller skates in slow motion to get the image that had come to me that morning.

SM: Did the little poem come in that early morning impression?
BB: I had written the poem the night before, I think, as I went to sleep. So it was all one film which only needed to be assembled. Later, I found myself down in my mother's flower garden getting some reds. I did an A, B, C roll, like I did for *Castro Street*. This technique was the most successful that I know about, aside from using optical printers. I laid out the A, B. and C rolls, doing the dissoves between A and C (I had a spring motor then that could do, at most, 25-second runs), dissolving from one shot of the sky to another, to make it look like one long shot. And B would fade in smoothly to bring in the black and white material of Tung. I could see where to fade her in, or fade her out, by just looking at the film on a light table. That was the nice thing about working in reversal.

Now there are no film stocks left! They removed them one at a time, like they remove everyting else that's beautiful in our world. They take away all the nice old buildings and the old fences, cut the trees, all the visually beautiful stuff disappeared, destroyed. They modified the old Ektachrome three times I think; then they withdrew it. They had an Ektachrome 50, ASA 50, reversal. That was pretty decent. Nobody used it a lot, but it was real nice. We found piles of it in the Seventies at the Houston surplus. And the Kodachrome before it was very interesting, but that disappeared right in the beginning. Then they got into these flat, uninteresting TV newsreel stocks and that's all they had left for awhile. I don't know what they use now—can't afford it anymore.

This society has a way of homogenizing every goddamn thing. I just can't tell you how I feel about it. When I moved to Olympia, there were a few little alternative corners left in town. Within five years, they were all destroyed, all the old docks, the alleys, the berry bushes, the crazy sailors, all gone. Horrible. And now we have the "New World Order," the storm troops, a world of "winners."

SM: When I interviewed Yiki Ino, she had an idea for a travelogue of Japan, where everything would be in super close-up; you wouldn't have to leave your room to make a travelogue. You could talk about noodles and have an extreme close-up of noodles . . .
BB: [Laughter]

SM: Her idea reminds me of Va*lentin de las Sierras*.
BB: Yeah.

SM: Which is like an
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BB: That's right.

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SM: Which is like an ethnographic film made up of textures.
BB: That's right.

SM: How did you end up in Mexico? Did you always carry a camera with you, when you travelled?
BB: That was one of the banners of the Sixties, filmmakers carrying their cameras. They got too heavy after awhile [laughter].

In *Valentin* I just shot simply but used a telephoto lens with an extension tube on the back, which gives you a very limited focal plane, a few inchew. No one I know ever uses it with a log lens, especially with a moving subject, but I really liked the way it looked. I had to get into the flesh of that town, with the merciless sun beating into the bricks of the street and all the death—every night there'd be something or somebody killed, lying in the street in the morning. I had met up with this (archetypal) young girl, riding her pony. And I was afraid to meet her father. I'd sent word out trying to see her, and he sent word back to come meet him, and I thought, "Oh, God!" But he turned out to be a very nice fellow; Manuel Sasa Zamora, of Jalisco. They were very poor and lived behind a big gate and had a horse and a dog named Penguina. That horse didn't like me and would not let me film. I had to give it up for awhile. Later, I named my horse after the film—Valentina.

SM: When I was looking through your films, the biggest discovery for me was *Quick Billy*. It's a pretty amazing film, and certainly begs for questions because it's so diverse. Reel 1 is very much about morning and creation.
BB: I think that beginning section is one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen in the movies. I had to get out of bed to make every one of those takes. I was really sick, with hepatitis. Tulley would help me up. I'd tie a knot in a big beach towel and pull in my liver with it. He'd walk me over to, say, the fish tank, and set the tripod up and load the camera. Then I'd do the take and go back to bed.

SM: The opening shot of Part 1 is very mysterious. The spectator never actually sees anything, just a shade of pink that gets a little more dense, then less, over a period of about 1 1/2 minutes. And I'm not sure what I'm hearing: sometimes it sounds like traffic, sometimes like the ocean.
BB: It's the ocean. Later, there are the sounds of passing timber trucks.

That opening is supposed to be the highest moment of illumination in the whole work. I was following the Tibetan description of the time between life and death, and that's either the illumined memory of perfection or the illumined moment of discovery. It can go either way. I never played the film backwards, but it was designed so it cound run backwards or forwards.

SM: You mean the whole film, all four parts?
BB: Let's see, the last reel was in narrative form so that would always run forward, but could be shown first. Then would come the end of Part 2, from the end to the beginning; then the end of Part 2 would come, then the end of Part 1. The end of the whole film would be the beginning shot with that pure light.

SM: So that version would move from the mundanery of conventional narrative towards this moment of supreme illumination, like a journey up the Chakras?
BB: I don't remember the whole story. I was describing my own death experience through the catalyst of hepatitis. I had studied *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bardo Thodol*). There the deceased is on a journey, "the time of uncertainty." The specters come to us as our own personal cinema: we are obliged to confront the results of our own deeds. It becomes more and more frightening. As I

pursued the experience, I found this delightful moment in the beginning which was so lovely; it degenerated into a terrifying but lovely cosmic storm. In T*he Tibetan Book of the Dead* each moment has an opposite side, and there's a color for every aspect. I forget their phraseology, but green, for example, in the positive side might be the jewel from the knowledge of equality (or some such Buddhist term); and on the opposite, negative side, the fearful aspect, jealousy.

In all the segments of *Quick Billy* I had a ruling form or deity. One was an old, wise horse named Amber that lived with us. I shot her mane against the black stormy sky. Then there'd be another form, another creature or person. Their opposite would appear in the second reel, all in the same order exactly, with the opposite meaning. So those first two reels were mates; they ran almost the same length. There's a continuing gradual degeneration, and the creatures of light become the terrifying beasts of darkness that are the guiding entities of the second reel.

The assignment, for the first time, given to me by the conditons of making the film, was not to make a beautiful film, but rather to make *document* about this inner passage, a little-described, but very common—in fact universal—phase of becoming human: the evolution of consciousness through which every man and woman eventually must go. There's hardly any infomation about it in our modern age, but it's common in the old civilizations: information as to how to make that passage. In contemporary culture we have the ballgame or warfare score on TV, the news-caters all reading the same, homogenized news.

I think my concept for *Quick Billy* is almost identical to Stan Brakhage's *Scenes from Under Childhood*, which explores the "scenes" prior to childhood—the scenes so near that time between being and not being. Brakhage was sending me those films at the time I was going through all this, and they were essentially identical to what I was making, I thought.

SM: What's the state of *Roslyn Romance*?
BB: Roslyn, Washington was one of the few remaining examples in North America of the kind of Old Europe village life that ended at the beginning of the 20th Century and was to a degree transported over here. I found myself in that town, with people from the "Old World." For them, reality was, "Well, I'm here in this house and I have a job and I'm respectable and I feed my children and love and protect them; I built this house to defend myself, my family, and this town from others and from the wilderness around us. That was the life I recorded in infinite detail in *Roslyn*, and a major theme of *Quixote* which preceded it .

I wanted to know, like Stendahl, *is that all there is*? I did ask them this question constantly. Every day I would leave my house and walk down the street like anyone else in the village and be stopped and invited in for Italian pastry or some other treat and an hour's gossip, on the way to the post office. I would ask myself, "Is it really true?"—the subtitle of the work. The unanswered question works itself through lots of rolls and reels after the formal introduction, which I just barely managed to finish in the Seveties while at Bard College before I had to move again. The rolls and notes to *Roslyn Romance* remain in my Washington archivery waiting to be finished and released.

The concluding part, which is called "The Cardinal's Visit," is a narrative film, conceived with my close friend and filmmaker, Elliot Caplan. I shot it with the last grant I had (an NEA) with the help of Elliot and a lovely apprentice and friend, Mr. Harley, who stayed in my little trailer in Upstate New York, between 1979 and 1981. We worked very hard for awhile. I was the Cardinal (I still have the costume). We shot about four hours of really pretty color

negative with very elaborate lighting set-ups. We'd do two or three set-ups a day, just about like a Hollywood film. There were usually three of us: me, the young woman and the man who played the young priest. I took a lot of the immediate dramatic detail from our everyday lives. For example in real life, the young guy fell in love with the girl. He didn't recognize the "Cardinal's" interest in her, and I didn't want to tell him about it. There wasn't any reason to tell him. But he was getting romantic about her, and he would call every night and was rejected by her as often. In the film, the Cardinal represented the church, but he was/is also a sensualist. His red cloth represents holy office a*nd* the fire of Hell, the torments of time and mortality.

I spent a lot of money on the film, shot with color negative. It's almost done. A friend of mine, Bonnie Jones, painted beautiful medieval title cards because there are a lot of book-like segments with chapter headings. I'm looking for a serious graduate film student who wants to finish the film as an M.A. or Ph.D. project. We could select what goes with what and edit it. Or he or she could put it together. I don't want ot do all that anymore. I'm too tired, and I'm concentrating on new work.

Because *movies* are viewed as popular art and thus the property of the masses, implicitly it's part of our thinking that anyone who uses film seriously, poetically, experimentally is transgressing on sacred convention—like asking the "tree cutters," who identify with "free enterprise," to use restraint in their resolute destruction of our common Eden. For the neighbors it can't be explained: "Who are you: What do you *do*? Why don't you get a *job*? You've got a wife and chilren!" God, there's no *end* to it. Or you come into town and you're filming something, and you try to explain, but if you're not making a profit, it's inexplicable to people, it doesn't compute. It's so exhausting. It's like being a pugilist: you can only do it so long. And when you're finally broke and broken, no one—truly very few—care at all.

My gift has been imagination. It's always alive and working; it loves *theater*. It seems to me that someone who's born to do that, should be doing that because all people benefit when creativity is alive. Just like a guy who's born to be a pugilist should do *that*. He shouldn't have to go through some system where there's a bunch of application forms and say,"Well, I would like to box, and I'm a potential champion," and be told, "Your application will be held on file. We appreciate your interest." You should be able to say, "Here's what I do, this is the time to do it!" Instead of all the nonsense of politics and "managerial policy": the film business and the academic business are merely mangers talking to managers. They're a caste who too often control the creative, which, as Joseph Campbell says, is so essential to society. It is art and myth that reflect our identity, our process, and our history. It is the path of the poet we follow; lonely tracks in the black snowy places of memory and unknown horizons.

Scott MacDonald teaches film history and American Literature at Utica College. He has published ***A Critical Cinema: In terviews with Independent Filmmakers*** *(University of California Press, 1988) and* ***A Critical Cinema 2*** *(University of California Press, 1992).*

FILM FORUM
15 Vandam Street
New York, N.Y. 10013 (212) 989-2994

February 23, 1976
For Immediate Release

Contact: Karen Cooper, Director
254-5997

Bruce Baillie, Seminal Figure in American Avant-Garde Film, Given Retrospective

A major figure in avant-garde filmmaking since the early '60s, Bruce Baillie has produced a body of work which encompasses lyrical studies in color and form as well as searing socio-political canvases of America. A recurring theme in Baillie's films is the coexistence of opposing realities: technology and innocence, freedom and oppression, wide open spaces and urban claustrophobia, that which is most romantic and alluring in the American landscape versus the growth of tragic and frightening forces. QUIXOTE and MASS each interweave provocative socio-political information within a haunting evocation of a larger, mythical vision of this land. CASTRO STREET, ALL MY LIFE, and VALENTIN DE LAS SIERRAS are dense, richly textured, and lovingly photographed film-poems.

MASS FOR THE DAKOTA SIOUX (1963-64, 24 mins.)
QUIXOTE (1964-65, 45 mins.)
ALL MY LIFE (1966, 3 mins.)
CASTRO STREET (1966, 10 mins.)
VALENTIN DE LAS SIERRAS (1968, 10 mins.)
Total running time: 92 minutes.

The program will be screened for the public Thursday through Sunday, March 11-14 and 18-21 at 7:30 P.M. at the Film Forum, 15 Vandam Street. There will be a press screening Friday, March 5 at 5:10 P.M. Date and time are subject to change, depending upon the needs of those critics who wish to attend. Please call the Director of the Film Forum to confirm press screening details.

Partially supported by the NYS Council on the Arts & the National Endowment for the Arts.

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FILM IS..., STEPHEN DWOSKIN, THE OVERLOOK PRESS 1975: WOODSTOCK, NY

sometimes further away, always from a slightly different angle from the one before. The poem's images sometimes develop into action, as in 'Man with Big General Notions', where we see a man miming the building of a house. This is an instance of a more direct interpretation of the poem, an illustration of the verbal by the visual.

Taken together, Antonucci's films reveal an approach to film that is directly linked to a pure, almost classical way of seeing. This strips the image of any obvious struggle for technique (though it is only by mastering a technique that one is able not to make the technique obvious). This stripping of the obvious and conscious is important because it gives depth and independent life to the image. This particular kind of independence, which is a feature of the best work produced in the other visual arts, such as drawing and painting (and sometimes photography), has not often been allowed in the cinema. Not, at least, until recently, or only in very personal film activities. Even here this purity of isolated and independent imagery has been limited or used only to create associations. Warhol's earlier films, such as *13 Most Beautiful Women*, are an example of an approach that is being increasingly used by many other film-makers, though each gives it his particular direction and emphasis. Another example here is Carlos Paex-Villaro's and Gerard Levy-Clerc's *Une Pulsation* (1969), made in Uruguay and France, where the images are isolated 'takes' or actions assembled like stanzas to create a feature-length film.

Brakhage's *Songs*, as we have seen, are a collection of short visual poems, independent lyrics. Another outstanding example of visual poetry is the American film-maker Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966), which makes use of imagery assembled like the lines of a printed poem. The lines are fluid, visual renderings of the sights and activities in an industrial street in Richmond, California – an oil refinery, a railway switchyard, a timber company. Baillie combines colour and black-and-white film stock in a rhythm produced by superimposition and diffusion. The mood is soft and dreamy, skilfully conveying the life of the landscape. By shooting the film through reflectors and by localizing actions and images, by altering the shape of the frame (with 'matter' placed over the lens), he has transformed industrial forms and activities into a personal interpretation of a particular environment. It is a beautiful film, very dependent on visual subtlety for its emotional effect. Carl Sandburg's words help to conjure up something of the mood it creates:

> The steelmill sky is alive. The fire breaks
> white and zigzag shot on a gun-metal gloaming . . .
>
> . . . a spectrum and a prism held in a moving monolith—

Yet they miss much of Baillie's personal tone. Even the soundtrack of this 10-minute film is a chamber piece constructed from the sounds of Castro

Street itself. The sound blending is soft and of a kind seldom achieved by others, except perhaps by Vertov in his first sound film.

Not many independent film-makers have focused their gaze on the man-made landscape in such a positive sense. Another is Ulrich Herzog, a German film-maker whose *Film Z Teil 1* is a very sensitive and poetic work centred on a council-type housing block. It sounds funny (and many people had a good laugh when the film was screened), but I found it a rich and positive statement about an increasingly common aspect of our environment. Images of the housing block seen by night, by day, moving past, far away, through a distorted lens, in close-up, through a hole, and so on, reveal a positive relationship between man and his own artefacts. Herzog's attitude can also be related to earlier films such as Ruttmann's *Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City* or Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*. Yet Baillie's work has a greater consciousness of the actual material he is using to develop his subjective visual interpretation.

Film can be described or explained only in terms of light and optics: visual effects. But if we are too aware of the effect (what it is, or how it is done) we are drawn away from the overall statement for the sake of a detail. An ultra-physical and ultra-rational description can be misleading. For instance, such a description as 'Baillie's talent most often lies in the separate image, usually with bizarre technical effects (i.e. overexposed film, colour filters, reflected images)', leaves the viewer seeking, remembering and questioning the methods employed to make a visual statement. This is certainly not to deny the importance of technique. Any image on film creates a 'visual effect'. But to stress, say, Baillie's 'bizarre technical effects' is misleading, for it is the statement, not the effect, that makes the film. Although film-makers may explore or 'experiment' with effects created by particular kinds of image, the experiment is over when the film is complete.

Baillie does not stick to one genre of visual expression but uses visual language for a particular purpose. His poetic black-and-white film *Mass* (1963/64) exposes the paradox of life within the American environment: the violence, the materialism, the destruction of the landscape by industry. The soft imagery is created by a multiple film language of superimposition and smooth, slow passes (sideways camera movement) flowing into or superimposed on to other slow passes. *Mass* is dedicated to the Sioux Indians of Dakota, where Baillie was born, and reveals his personal preoccupation with them. One of the programme notes states that he dedicates it to a religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Christian mass. The film becomes the Christian paradox as exemplified by the mass, a celebration of life, with an imagery that illustrates its powers of destruction. It contains an almost Cocteau-esque death. The rider on a motorbike (a recurrent image in American films from *Scorpio Rising* to *Easy Rider*) escorts a hearse through the new American man-made wastelands, while the sound track develops into a Gregorian chant.

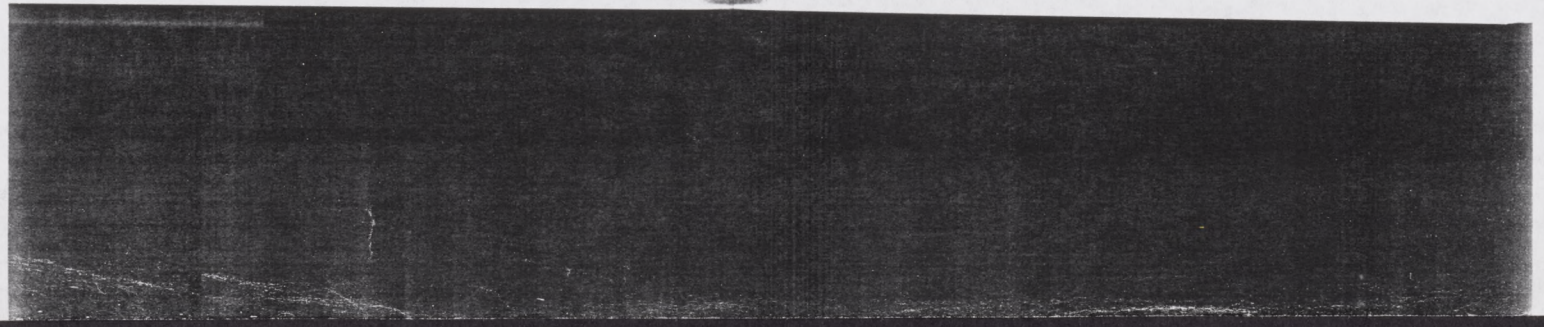
Some of Baillie's films, such as *To Parsifal* (1963), *Quixote* (1965), *All My Life* (1966), *Still Life* (1966), plus earlier works in a more documentary vein such as *The News* or *Mr Hayashi* (1961), are even richer in their use of the resources of film language. All in all, he is one of the most committed, as well as one of the most poetic, of film-makers.

Because many independent film-makers are inspired to make films by a personal urge to express themselves and have never been connected with the cinema industry or conditioned by it, they revitalize film language. Their exploration of the visual language enriches our seeing, just as poetry enriches ordinary verbal language. Cocteau once said: 'I've been completely free only with *Le Sang d'un Poète*, because I didn't know anything about film art. I invented it for myself as I went along, and used it like a draughtsman dipping his fingers for the first time in Indian ink and smudging a sheet of paper with it.' The same applies to most personal/independent/experimental film-makers, though some do conceive their films in the terms of the cinema industry. This 'naïve' exploration of the medium, unhampered by any preconceptions, has resulted in a widening of the visual experience. One development has been the attempt to use the physical nature of the film process as the subject of the film. Another is the effort to remove any associations from the photographed image, and to have no narrative links between images (though it can be argued that we all interpret even the most abstract images and give them some narrative structure). Yet another development is the attempt to arrive at a purer sense of the space, time and motion involved in the film process: to make the film a more self-contained, phenomenological experience.

One vital development of the visual language and our comprehension of it has come about through films that differentiate between the ability of the film to contain an image and the ability of the film to be an image. There is some overlap here, as with films in which physical qualities (such as grain or blurriness) merge with the recorded image. There are innumerable examples of this physical blending, particularly in the work of Bruce Baillie or Jack Smith.

> But this isn't seeing! – But this is seeing! – it must be possible to give both remarks a conceptual justification.
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein

But more important to the development of the language is the work of certain film-makers who have concentrated on evolving a *film which is of its own image* by breaking down any inherent symbolism or associative values of the recorded image. The aim is to create a visual language that in no way refers to anything outside the film itself. The attempt to make the film



LUCY FISCHER

Castro Street: The Sensibility of Style

I do not place the artist on a pedestal as a little god. He is only the interpreter of the inexplicable, for the layman the link between the known and the unknown, the beyond. This is mysticism, of course! How else can one explain why a combination of lines by Kandinsky or a form by Brancusi, not obviously related to the cognized world does bring such intense response . . . granted the eye becomes excited, why?

—Edward Weston,
The Flame of Recognition

In making this entry of April 7, 1930 in his classic *Daybooks,* Edward Weston touched upon one of the central mysteries of our response to art; the manner in which pure forms can speak to us and impress us with a sense of their meaning. He characterizes the process as essentially mystical; but his consciousness of the materiality of form and structure seems to render him somewhat uneasy with that conclusion and he ends the passage much as he began, still questioning why.

It is thoughts of this nature which inflect our response to *Castro Street* by Bruce Baillie. Like the works of a Brancusi or Kandinsky it is fundamentally an abstract composition. For the rhetoric of pure line and form it substitutes the orchestration of photographic images treated as graphic elements within a complex montage design. And like the response to abstract art expressed by Weston in his remarks, our reaction to *Castro Street* involves a level of questioning. For the potency of its address inspires us to fathom the means by which its plastic abstractions communicate a sense of their significance.

On the surface *Castro Street* presents an audio-visual tapestry in which footage of a railroad yard and oil refinery are subtly interwoven. Strands of imagery (of trains, smokestacks, industrial landscapes) appear on the screen to the accompaniment of a score of muted mechanical sounds. Discrete shots, however, seem devoid of autonomous, representational status. Rather each becomes a pictorial thread intertwined with others in the fabric of an overall pattern.

In this manner *Castro Street* creates for the spectator an experience which transcends the nature of its literal subject. As we watch graceful figures of train cars float by, and listen to the dampened sounds of engine-whistle screams, what we apprehend is not a picture of the industrial décor. Rather what we experience is something more vague and ethereal; it is a sense of profound and dynamic resolution.

What we perceive in our viewing of *Castro Street* finds reverberations in certain experiences Baillie seems to have had at the time of the film's creation. We know that it was made during a severe period in the artist's life, one in which he felt as if he "were being born";[1] hence his cryptic epithet for the film—"the coming of consciousness."

Although the exact nature of that experience is known to Baillie alone, two enigmatic notes he made at the time offer us entree to his private sensibility as well as an approach to the aesthetics of the film. One appears in the form of a handwritten entry on a printed program for a screening of *Castro Street* and reads:

> the confrontation of opposites (Carl Jung)
> "the strength or conflict of becoming"[2]

Clearly the quote implies a relationship in Baillie's mind between the process of becoming ("the coming of consciousness") and the psychic confrontation of opposites. Its use on a program note suggests a further link between this concep-

THE SHORT AND THE DIFFICULT

Because of its analogies with drama and novel, the analyst of fictional narrative film can draw upon literally thousands of years of critical analysis—stretching back through Aristotle's *Poetics*, which laid out the fundamental critical categories (plot, character, spectacle, and so on) which go echoing on, even now, through the columns of your daily paper's film review section. Generations of Hollywood practitioners have put down on paper their accumulated how-to-do-it structural wit and wisdom. More recently theoreticians have attempted to deploy the machinery of linguistic and folk-tale analysis in order to understand how narrative films are put together. Though individual films continue to offer puzzles that tax even brilliant critics, there do not seem to be any greatly challenging theoretical lacunae in this area.

But astonishingly little work has been done on non-narrative forms. It is as if, in the history of literary study, virtually no attention had been paid to lyric poetry or the short story—only to novels and plays.

It seems likely that the structures of short, lyric forms are distinctly different from those of longer forms. The familiar, reliable devices of tension and suspense do not seem to apply, at least not in any easily recognizable way. Effects are often more akin to those of song than of drama. Visual considerations carry relatively more weight than in the story film where "action" tends to predominate, yet they are hard to describe and assess. In short, if we are to understand how the lyric film "works," we evidently need an entirely different sort of critical and theoretical approach than we use for the narrative film. Yet even the devotees of independent or experimental or "underground" cinema have failed to develop the new ideas that might enable us to understand such works on a more than impressionistic basis.

It is time to begin to try to remedy this situation. In this issue we publish several articles which attempt to deploy a critical methodology appropriate to non-narrative works. Perhaps significantly, two of these deal with films by Bruce Baillie—whose works are among those in our independent cinema that most resist paraphrase into verbal structures.

tion and the formal structure of the film. This is substantiated by a reading of Baillie's catalogue description of *Castro Street.* For its language makes clear the sense of dialectical interactions imposed upon the configuration of the work:

> Castro Street running by the Standard Oil Refinery in Richmond, California . . . switch engines on one side and refinery tanks, stacks, and buildings on the other—the street and the film ending at a red lumber company. All visual and sound elements from the street, progressing from the beginning to the end of the street, one side is black-and-white (secondary) and one side is color—like male and female elements.[3]

But Baillie's perceptions of the period were of a more complex and resonant character. For in addition to a sense of the confrontation of opposites, Baillie postulated their ultimate dissolution. Thus while the world presents apparent polarities, true consciousness affords the perspective from which to apprehend their resolution. This notion seems best articulated in a second note by the artist, one which constitutes an entry in his *Castro Street* journals:

> now in my work, beyond sequence
> beyond distinctions. . . .

way of conceiving reality
sequence/knowledge
beyond to
real consciousness (ego loss)
= agitation-less (loss)[4]

Clearly it is this sense of oppositions confronted and synthesized which one perceives as dynamic resolution in one's viewing experience of *Castro Street*. To inscribe this "way of conceiving reality" within the design of the film, Baillie has abstracted his photographic imagery to such a degree that it no longer presents an external depiction of reality. Rather it seems to have penetrated the surface of worldly appearance in order to render a vision of its deeper structures.

In grappling with the issue of our response to abstract art Weston had relegated its power to the realm of mysticism, thus avoiding a fruitful answer to the question. He had, however, concluded with a critical challenge, by asking "how *else*" we might explain art's cogent effect. In many ways an examination of *Castro Street* provides an occasion to engage that challenge. For rather than some "inexplicable link . . . between the known and the unknown," we find, upon analysis of the cinematic text, concrete relationships between Baillie's "metaphysical" postulations and his methods of plastic organization. Thus the dynamic of oppositions confronted and resolved which Baillie enunciated in his writings is manifested in the film on the level of formal interactions between color, movement, and sound.

While for Baillie the "coming of consciousness" arose in the domain of spiritual revelation, for the viewer of *Castro Street* it transpires in the realm of critical insight. For not only does the film afford us access to Baillie's particular sensibility; it occasions a consciousness of the means by which a sensibility can be articulated in a rigorous artistic form.

On all its complex tectonic levels the central mechanism of *Castro Street* involves the construction of formal oppositions in order ultimately to deconstruct them and dissolve the very notion of opposition itself. In this regard Baillie departs from the Eisensteinian conception of montage as collision. For while the Eisensteinian aesthetic calls for the intensification of oppositions, Baillie's editing style works toward the nullification of oppositions. If for Eisenstein "art is always conflict according to its methodology,"[5] for Baillie *Castro Street* encompasses a gesture in the direction "beyond sequence, beyond distinctions . . ."

But, of course, to "go beyond" implies at first being "there"; and it is by examining the modes of articulating formal polarities within *Castro Street* that we arrive at a vision of how they are ultimately transcended into unity.

Castro Street is, above all else, a film of hyperbolic superimposition; from beginning to end it creates a uniform texture of densely enmeshed imagery. It would seem that implicit in the very mechanics of superimposition would be the kind of dialectical conflict that formed the basis of Eisenstein's theory of montage. After all, in superimposition it is as though the myriad oppositions that Eisenstein had posited as arising between the shots are encompassed literally within the frame itself.

If one examines the course of Baillie's career, however, one seems to witness a growing dissatisfaction with the dialectical quality of superimposition, and an evolution in the contrary direction. He speaks, for example, in disparaging terms of his use of "gross" superimpositions in *Quixote* and refers to his technical endeavor as "crudely trying to combine images on the screen at the same moment."[6]

Despite its perceived failures, however, *Quixote* did mark for Baillie the initiation of an attempt to neutralize the oppositions inherent in superimposition. It signaled a move in Baillie's work toward allowing diverse imagery to "share the frame."[7] This stylistic trend would ultimately culminate in the creation of *Quick Billy* in 1970; but *Castro Street* stands as a major aesthetic plateau along the way. The making of *Castro Street* in fact seems to have embodied Baillie's shift in formal direction:

> I used two projectors when I edited . . . When I first projected it, the two things together, it was a beautiful film just as it was. I projected on the same spot on the screen not side by side as it would be when I finally had done it.[8]

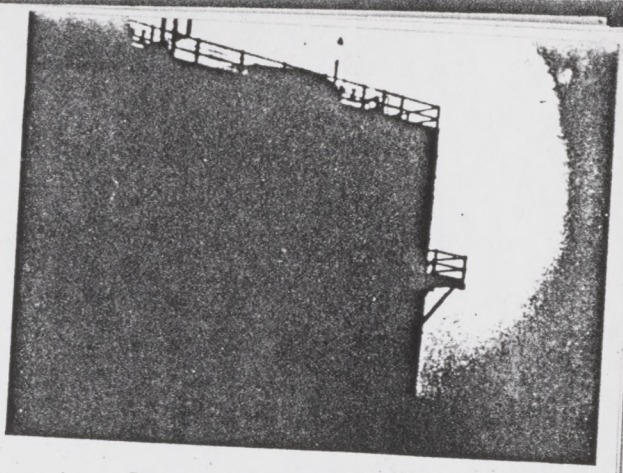
In *Castro Street*, therefore, Baillie veers from a heavily layered style of superimposition to a style

of superimposed contiguity. Through this technique images are planted in neighboring segments of the frame—either by direct superimposition or by the more elusive strategy of matting.

Castro Street begins in darkness with Baillie's name handwritten across the screen. The center of the frame then opens up in muted color to reveal what appears to be a camera lens. The frame contracts once more and closes. A slit of light becomes visible in the lower portion of the frame. Gradually, the light pattern shifts and we realize that what we have seen has been light reflected off a glass surface, through which we now vaguely perceive the outline of smoke. The glass is then pulled away and bares the image of industrial smokestacks. Two matted areas (in upper and lower right-hand corners of the frame) fade in. Each one records a slightly different view of a commercial landscape as seen from the window of a moving vehicle. Next a faint diagonal wipe takes away the large-scale image of the smokestacks; the twin mattes remain. Another portion of the frame then unfolds to display a more defined image of industrial chimneys. This matted area travels upward in the frame while simultaneously the two earlier corner mattes fade out. Eventually a diagonally composed negative image of a high tension wire (as seen from a moving car) fades in and inhabits the frame with a circular matte containing the image of a smokestack.

What becomes apparent from this description is the seamlessness of Baillie's design (a seamlessness which makes the attempt at verbal translation an act of critical hubris.) Rather than creating a sense of superimposed images in dialectical conflict, Baillie works against this to create a sense of coherent union. He embeds one image within another and fuses them so that they "come out as though they were married."[9]

Perhaps the most mystifying example of this technique occurs towards the end of the film. The sequence begins with a low-angle shot of a man standing on an industrial machine against the background of a blue sky. At a certain point the center of the frame gapes open (like a wound) and shows us a yellow-tinted image of a metal pipe. Magically the image of the man (which has become the matting environment of the second shot) transforms to a monotone blue, then to a solid black, and finally returns to the image of the man. The central yellow area then closes up and disappears.



Raw footage showing the matting process used in CASTRO STREET. *[Canyon Cinema]*

It is this organic sense of the connection of shots that is so crucial to the power of *Castro Street*—the sense of a shot opening up and closing to reveal a second shot, much as the iris of the eye expands and contracts to delineate the boundaries of the pupil.

Thus we find that the heightening of shot distinctions that traditionally occurs in layered superimposition becomes an annihilation of distinctions in the kinetics of matting. Matting is, after all, the quintessential Hollywood illusionist technique; it allows the fluid combination of images without the telltale traces of superimposition. It accomplishes the merging of images while blurring our consciousness of the act of fusion.

The intention to combine shots was at points inscribed within the very process of shooting the film itself. For in recording images Baillie used his black-gloved hand to reserve spaces which would later be occupied by other shots.

Concomitant with the elimination of shot differentiation in *Castro Street* is the weakening of temporal distinctions. Often the images so joinlessly share the frame that it is difficult to establish whether they were photographed simultaneously as one shot or represent two separate temporal moments joined only in the editing

process. As Baillie has phrased it in relation to *Quick Billy,* his matting strategy is one of overlaying imagery so that it "looks like it was all invented or occurring at the same moment."[10]

But it is not purely the technique of matting that creates the sense of image resolution; it is also Baillie's means of rhythmically choreographing the images in succession. What one notices in analyzing *Castro Street* is the "transactions" that take place between shots. As one matte fades out, another, perhaps, fades in. Thus one set of imagery is continually exchanged for another in intricate patterns of balanced and symmetrical progression. At one point in the film, for example, we have a shot involving two layers of superimposition. The first presents a negative image of the ground, and the second a negative representation of trains in motion. As the latter image remains on the screen the former fades out; but as it does so it is replaced by a shot of flowers in close-up. Through this technique of the interchange of imagery, shots are joined not only by their compression within the boundaries of the frame but by the kinetics of the editing process itself. Baillie seems to be alluding to this sense of montage when he formulates his notion of the cut as the moment "when one thing *becomes another* in succession."[11]

This sense of one thing becoming another is further accentuated by the fact that the pace of movement from shot to shot in *Castro Street* is one of lulling uniformity. Thus the rhythm of a tracking shot on one image level of the frame sill be synchronous with a panning action on another. The similarity of tempo works to nullify the disjunction in form and subject.

Not only does the matting process minimize the boundaries between discrete shots, it works as well to soften the rigid quadrilateral borders of the frame. Thus Baillie utilizes the biomorphically shaped matte provided by his hand to "get away from geometry" and create a "moving amorphous form."[12]

Another formal opposition that Baillie simultaneously activates and neutralizes is that of black-and-white versus color. His engagement of the tonal conflict is even apparent in his description of the film: " . . . picture and sound taken on one street—the color side female, the black and white side male, in opposition (creation)."[13]

But it is characteristically ambiguous that Baillie has chosen a sexual analogy to illustrate this formal polarity. For implicit in the invocation of discrete sexual elements is the possibility of their fusion in sexual union.

Most often in *Castro Street* tonalitites are opposed through the technique of superimposition; thereby, one of the layers of imagery will be recorded in color while the other will be shot in black and white. Frequently this disparity is heightened by the fact that the black-and-white layer has been realized in high-contrast negative. One example of this pattern occurs midway through the film in a multi-tiered composite image of objects in movement. On one layer a yellow train car moves left to right across the screen while on another a black-and-white train wheel floats by in the same direction.

Given this virtually textbook case of montage "collision," what accounts for the fact that our experience of the tonal dialectics of *Castro Street* is one of essential tranquillity? It would seem that several formal strategies are at work to dampen the potential sense of chromatic tension.

First of all, Baillie begins the film in highly muted color, the kind that barely reaches consciousness as such. It is a ghostly color that forms a vaporous immaterial hue, like that of a rainbow. On this level Baillie's subdued chromatics tend to accentuate the ethereality of his images, as well as to blur the perceptual distinction between color and black-and-white.

Having established this diluted tonality Baillie then begins quite carefully to introduce "true" colors, almost as "characters" into the abstract narrative. Red is the "star" of the film; it comes as the first rich color on the caboose of a train and it reappears in the middle of the film, at first anamorphically, and then as a red steering wheel. Characteristically it closes the film with the climactic image of the dome-roofed lumber barn at the end of the street.

Significantly, blue and yellow play supporting roles as the other major colors in which *Castro Street* is painted. Blue appears as the hazy back-

ground in which so many images are planted and also as the sky. Yellow hues occur on industrial pipes, in an anamorphic vision of rocks, and, most strikingly, in a field which neighbors Castro Street.

Blue, yellow, and red are, of course, the primary colors. Thus *Castro Street* is tinted in archetypal tones: black (the absence of color), white (the presence of all colors) and the primary colors (those which are parents to all the rest.)

Certain theoretical speculations arise from this formal choice. First of all, it seems telling that in utilizing black-and-white Baillie saw fit to invert their values through negative printing. In so doing, the comfortable opposition of the absence or presence of color is turned on its head and disarmed. Moreover, at times during the film Baillie chooses to dissect white light through prismatic lenses, thereby revealing the presence of variegated spectral hues in its apparently monochrome band. Finally, the selection of primary colors adds further complexities to the tonal structure. For although primary colors in "montage collision" create all other chromatic hues, theirs is essentially a seamless union. As R.L. Gregory explains it in *Eye and Brain:* " . . . two colours give a third colour in which the constituents cannot be defined. Constituent sounds are heard as a chord and can be separately identified . . . but no training allows us to do the same for light.[14] Thus primary colors work in montage in a manner similar to that of Baillie's imagery: distinctions are apparently there and not there at the same time.

Another formal conflict which is engaged and then released within the dynamics of *Castro Street* is the directional opposition of movement. Once more its primary means of formulation is the technique of superimposition. Throughout the film when images share the frame we often find that they embody movement in opposing screen directions. Typical of this pattern is a shot involving directly superimposed images of trains in motion: one image layer moves horizontally left to right, while the other moves diagonally into the depth of the frame. Perhaps the most hyperbolic instance of editing for antagonistic movement comes rather early in the film. A variety of moving-train images in high contrast negative are edited in split-screen format so that they seem to crash together in the central axis of the frame.

This moment, however, in its climacticism, is essentially uncharacteristic of the mode in which Baillie handles movement in the rest of the film. For in general in *Castro Street* Baillie works to resolve rather than heighten the sense of polarity of movement; and he does so by employing a variety of techniques. To begin with, when editing images of opposing motion Baillie most often juxtaposes movements executed in quasi-identical rhythms. Thereby the synchronicity of the pace of movements seems to blur our recognition of their antipathetic directions. Rather than collide, the images tend to cancel each other out and leave us with a sense of quiescent stasis. One is reminded of an exchange between Baillie and an interviewer that appeared in *Film Comment:*

> BB: I have to say finally what I *am* interested in, like Socrates: peace . . . rest . . . nothing.
>
> FC: No movement at all?
>
> BB: Nothing. Okay, that's enough.[15]

Exceptions do occur when Baillie utilizes a sense of syncopation in the rhythm of objects in motion. Ironically, however, the example that comes to mind is one in which the objects depicted are moving in the *same* direction. Toward the end of the film we have an image of a right-to-left tracking shot over signs plastered on a wall. Next the image of a train moving in the same direction fades in, superimposed. The pace of the train, however, is slower than that of the track and at points its movement seems to be reversed.

Thus when directionally contrary movements are involved Baillie works to buffer their sense of opposition; where similarity exists, distinctions are maintained. "Different" is the "same" and the "same" is "different" until the very poles of the semantic equation become meaningless.

But movement in *Castro Street* involves a greater subtlety as well; for central to our experience of its ambiguity is Baillie's blurring of the distinctions between the camera and its object as a source of movement. This is possible because of the phenomenon of relativity of movement in film. As Rudolf Arnheim explains it in *Film As Art:*

> Since there are no bodily sensations to indicate whether the camera was at rest or in motion, and if in motion at what speed or in what direction, the camera's position is, for want of other evidence, presumed to be fixed. Hence if something moves in the picture this motion is at first seen as a movement of the things itself and not as the result of a movement of the camera gliding past a stationary object. In the extreme case this leads to the direction of motion being reversed.[16]

Thus throughout *Castro Street* even the secure notion of directionality is confounded. We may see objects move by from screen right to left but more often than not, examination reveals them to be stationary objects photographed by a camera moving from left to right.

Inherent in this paradox are certain theoretical overtones. For by employing this perceptual ambiguity Baillie generates confusions between the traditional antipathies of stasis and motion, and left and right. And the reason that these polarities can be questioned is that he has dissolved a third and more profound distinction: that between the perceiver and the perceived. Thus because of the ambiguity concerning whether it is the perceiver (i.e., the camera eye) or the object perceived (or both) that is in motion, it is possible that what is moving within the frame may, in fact, be static; and what "moves" left may have been photographed by a camera moving right.

A unifying sensibility is also apparent in two final parameters of the film's construction. *Castro Street* embraces a variety of modes of vision yet works to resolve any tension engendered by their disparity. Where "clear" images prevail Baillie works against their sense of realism and definition by using matting, dampened coloration, negative printing or the slurring effect of an improperly threaded camera.[17] Where anamorphic photography occurs Baillie often subverts its sense of abstraction by removing the distorting, mediating gel and revealing the subject in sharp focus. Obviously, the mutually exclusive perceptual modes implied by the polarities of color versus black-and-white, negative versus positive registration are contained as well within the incorporative vision of the film.

In many ways the confounding of styles of vision mirrors the conflation of perceptual modes that we find in Baillie's diaries and notebooks. Just as clear and anamorphic sections intermix within the film, so fragments from waking and dream states flow together in the journals.

Baillie also works in *Castro Street* to nullify any sense of disjunction between the sound and image tracks. He does so, however, without resorting to the facile technique of illusionistic sync sound. Rather *Castro Street* creates a highly abstract sound track that, while never illustratively coinciding with the images, provides an almost synaesthetic aural equivalent for them. The texture of the sound track parallels that of the images and follows a similar "narrative" line. In sections where the editing of the shots creates a regular, lulling rhythm (e.g., the opening of the film), the sound track heightens this mode of temporality by intoning monotonous chugging train sounds. At moments of visual climax (e.g., when a mass of superimposed images "crash" in the center of the screen) the sounds take the form of louder, harsher shrill whistle screams.

This formal unity of sound and image is characteristic of other films by Baillie. The highly montagist section of *Mass* which presents an assertive visual collage translates this strategy to the aural parameter as well. Thus Baillie accompanies images from old movies and television with fragments of dialogue from commercials, newscasts, and television dramas. The total fusion of sound and image in *All My Life* (which consists of a single tracking shot of a fence accompanied by Ella Fitzgerald's rendition of the title song) is apparent in Baillie's characterization of the film as "a singing fence."[18]

Just as sound-to-image dichotomies are blurred in *Castro Street,* so sound-to-sound distinctions are elided. Disparate mechanical sounds blend together and those ostensibly from the train yard merge indistinguishably with those from the oil refinery, forming a unified aural composition.

Ultimately even the subject matter of *Castro Street* reveals its own impulse toward bracketing contradictions. Like the industrial landscape of *Red Desert* the mise-en-scène of *Castro Street* stands as a hybrid cross of barren technological sordidness and stark arresting beauty. As P.

Bruce Baillie's CASTRO STREET *[Canyon Cinema]*

Adams Sitney noted: "When we look at the whole of [Baillie's] work we see in alternation two incompatible themes; the sheer beauty of the phenomenal world and the utter despair of forgotten men."[19]

Yet central to the magic of *Castro Street* would seem to be its power to make the incompatible compatible—to contain contradictions both on a formal and thematic level. It is, perhaps, even more profoundly the point of *Castro Street* to refuse us the comfort of such categorical polarities at all. One is curiously reminded of Eisenstein's discussion of Japanese culture and of his analysis of their traditional synthesis of the oppositions of auditory and visual material:

> audio visual relationships . . . derive from the principles of Yang and Yin, upon which is based the entire system of Chinese world outlook and philosophy . . . Yang and Yin . . . depicted as a circle, locked together within it *Yang* and *Yin—Yang*, light; *Yin*, dark—each carrying within itself the essence of the other, each shaped to the other—*Yang* and *Yin, forever opposed, forever united.*[20]

It is precisely this sense of unity revealed in disunity, of resolution in opposition that reigns supreme on all levels of *Castro Street*—on the level of shot-to-shot superimposition, directionality of movement, tonal composition, sound-image relation, and spiritual sensibility.

As Baillie has told us, *Castro Street* is a film "in the form of a street." Implicit in this notion seems the concept of the film as path, or even journey. We know from Baillie's autobiographical notes that the film was for him a "coming of consciousness—a recognition of the confrontation of opposites as part of the "conflict of becoming." But throughout the film itself embedded within the opaque imagery have been signs which seem to bear hidden messages relevant to Baillie's concerns. Thus the graphic "X" of the railroad crossing sign seems a symbolic diagram of the structure of the film (which is, after all, an intersection point of formal and thematic oppositions). And the appearance of the railroad name of "Union Pacific" emblazoned on a passing car seems tinged by a vague, metaphysical resonance.

But it is the final emblem of the film that warrants our most attentive reading, and it appears in the form of a sign for Castro Street that floats by on the screen. For contained within the graphics and articulation of that closing image is inscrolled

the very dynamics that have informed the style and meaning of the film. It is an image that speaks a language of resolved oppositions: It is one of the final images of the work yet presents to us for the first time the title of the film. It is recorded in black-and-white negative yet is superimposed over a positively registered red-colored barn dome image. It *moves* across the screen, yet was, of course, in reality, *static*. It drifts past us right to left but depicts an arrow which points left to right.

Thus the sign which bears the name of Castro Street is clearly more than a street sign. Its pregnant mode of presentation proposes it as truly exemplary of the formal and thematic energies of the film.

NOTES

1. Richard Whitehall, "Interview with Bruce Baillie," *Film Culture*, No. 47, pp. 17-18.
2. Bruce Baillie, Program for *Castro Street*, File: Museum of Modern Art.
3. Bruce Baillie in P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 208.
4. Bruce Baillie, Notebook entry, May 22, 1966.
5. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), p. 48.
6. Bruce Baillie, Museum of Modern Art Cineprobe Tape, April 7, 1970.
7. Richard Corliss, "Bruce Baillie: An Interview," *Film Comment*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring 1971), p. 25.
8. Whitehall, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
9. Bruce Baillie, Museum of Modern Art Cineprobe Tape, April 7, 1970.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Corliss, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
12. Bruce Baillie, MOMA Cineprobe Tape, April 7, 1970.
13. Bruce Baillie, in *Harbinger*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1967), p. 32.
14. R.L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), p. 119.
15. Corliss, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
16. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film As Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 31-32.
17. Sitney, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
18. Bruce Baillie in *Harbinger*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1967), p. 34.
19. Sitney, Museum of Modern Art Circular #66.
20. Eisenstein, *Film Sense*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947), p. 93.

ALAN WILLIAMS

The Structure of Lyric: Baillie's To Parsifal

It's difficult to say exactly where or how *To Parsifal* is a lyric film and where or how a narrative work. For this reason, ordinary critical vocabularies (based on certain "types" of films) do not apply with much usefulness to Bruce Baillie's abstractly assembled color images, nor to the nature and functions of his sound track. To get a sense of how this film *works* it will be necessary first to break it down, *outline* it, in order to see how the (implied) viewer puts it together.*

The 16-minute film falls neatly into two nearly equal parts, separated by fades to and from black. Part one depicts a sunrise, a journey out to sea in a boat, then gulls flying around the boat while fish are cleaned, and finally the journey back and the reappearance of land. This is, narratively, a reasonably clear presentation of a fishing voyage; the only strange thing, informationally, is the

* The "viewer" here, strictly speaking, means the principle of possible meanings built into the work, the ways in which structures outside the film *must* be brought to bear in order for its reading to be coherent, to make "sense" of some sort. In this way, the text *needs* the implicit "viewer."

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May 5, 1990

To: Cinematograph
c/o Jeffrey Skoller
NYC

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The latter film is formed around three layers of text, suggesting the documentary, while in fact the content is finally fictional (filmed events and relationships all arose from real, everyday situations especially between the persons making the film). The more brief rolls and reels of the not yet released body of The Roslyn Romance also work with the filmmaker's notebooks, containing worded material more after the fashion of "postcard writing".

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Media Study/Buffalo

Castro Street, by Bruce Baillie (shot in Richmond California, 1966)

Many explanations have been given for the differences between the "independent" cinema tradition and the feature film, but the reasons advanced are almost as numerous and varied as the independent film, since no one is certain exactly what should be considered typical in the cinematic avant-garde. Nonetheless, we can say that Baillie's film does present one recurrent problem dealt with by independent film artists. This is the question of point of view.

From its very beginnings, narrative cinema has presented stories to spectators. The tale told may be simple or complicated, it may be directed to naive or sophisticated viewers. But the feature film has always assumed (more or less) the principles of the traditional theatre performance, because the spectator is given one place from which he or she experiences the story. In the beginning this was literally the case, when cameras were placed in front of theatre-like stages and photographed the actors in long, static shots. Narrative film has become more sophisticated, of course, through camera movement and cutting, but the old principles still apply - we are placed somewhere, and see a unified set of images.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Castro Street is the function of its title. What do we see? One side of the street is photographed in color, the other in black and white; the two sets of images are superimposed, played off against each other like separate melodic lines in a musical piece. But the street itself is only the unifying element, the empty strip of land from which the trains (on one side) and factories (on the other) may be photographed. We do not see the street itself. Baillie's film is not a set of things "given to be seen". As the title indicates, what is essential is the place from which we see.

But this "place" is not unified. Rather, it has been deliberately fragmented. If Baillie had shown us first one side of the street and then the other, or even if he had intercut (that is, alternated) them, we would have the impression of a traditional film's depiction of a certain environment. However, the images are superimposed. How can we see in two directions at once? But this is only one ex-

ample of fragmentation in the film, for the combination of color and black and white within the same image creates an even greater breakup of the viewer's sense of stability. We have all learned to see color or monochrome images as showing what things look like. We learn to do this in much the same way as we learn to read or to listen to music. But combined color and monochrome within an image presents us with a massive problem in pulling together what we see.

We may only do this by "letting go" of our normal ways of looking at films,by looking at the image itself and not seeing "through" it directly to any supposed reality. Baillie wants us to see, but to see not merely the "subject" - buildings and trains - but the film itself. He does this by making the only possible "point of view" that which is given on the celluloid of the work itself -- the film as "street". We do not see the street, but we see from it, through it.

One final comment: in the Filmmakers' Cooperative Catalogue #5 (New York, 1971,where the reader may also find a complete Baillie filmography), the artist has said that the "emergence of a long switch-engine shot (black-and-white solo) is to the filmmaker the essential of consciousness." I don't claim to explain how this might be so, but look for that shot. It is very striking, with a slanted movement which distinguishes it from the largely horizontal motions of the rest of the film. It's impossible to say why, but it feels something like what consciousness must be, at least within the context of the unseen place that Bruce Baillie calls Castro Street.

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THE P-38 PILOT

Last month Bruce Baillie sent me a copy of his latest video, "The P-38 Pilot," with a request that I review it. Before I had an opportunity to see it, though, we talked on the phone, and we launched into a long dialogue of shared thoughts. We discussed the need artists have to communicate beyond themselves, and the difficulties of such communication within this current, American society. Bruce led into it by encouraging me to send him a sample of my own film work, if possible. Then, despite the fact that we both asserted we create out of a desperate need to overcome isolation, I found myself blurting out in frustration that I no longer want to hear any response to my films.

Later I wondered about this contradiction, and the obvious indication that my isolation is self-imposed. In fact, Bruce and I both live our lives in a way that many people might regard as self-imposed isolation. If we are so hungry for response, why not welcome, rather than reject it?

With the above frustration at work, and Bruce and my conversation in mind, I viewed Bruce's video, "The P-38 Pilot." It is not surprising that Bruce dedicates it to "the dispossessed, the excluded, condemned, fallen from life and loving." In it, a gravelly-voiced man, a self-named "boozer and a loser," is heard talking to Bruce about his life. The man was once a heroic pilot, he could fly P-38s "~~on~~ stand on their ass." He had skill, he had brains, he had "everything right in my lap, Bruce. I had football, baseball, golf, I had everything." He could have had scholarships, he could "make these idiots like Palmer look sick." But he threw it all away, he let it all go down the drain. "Why?," he says, "Why? I'm no fucking bum, I'm an intelligent person."

The piece is a cohesive Baillie song of sound and sight, a flowing visual essay. Bruce has made the transition from the film to the video format, without compromising the beauty of the image. The Baillie artistry has survived intact.

"The P-38 Pilot" begins with a canvas of blended, delicate color. Soft violet and pale yellow are separated by a whitish area, and water drips, very fresh, down the silvery texture of a window screen. We hear the pilot's friendly/belligerent voice: "You think I'm crazy, don't you? Huh? Huh?"

The image moves gently downward, into vague floral shapes in

blues and lavenders. "That's right, Bruce, I'm no rank idiot, believe me. I'm a hell of a guy." There is a blob of color, a face. Is there a hand on the screen? A figure moves, pulling at the colors, changing them. "I'm not a bad one. I'm not a bad pistol~~e~~, believe me." Pink spreads like a rapid stain, changes to blue, and the blob grows. "I've delved in~~to~~ the in~~q~~quities of hell, Bruce. ~~I have.~~" Our eyes lift up to a kind of horizon, where three little people-figures take form. "I've done it. I've lived it." The movement continues upward to the title, and we hear words from a popular melody of ~~o~~ a bygone time: "I've found the dream that I can speak to; a dream that I can call my own."

Upward still to the outline of a P-38, and then the pilot (or author) himself, behind a silvery haze, trying to look in. "You see what's happened to me? I can fly those crazy birds like an idiot. Stand 'em on their ass, I can. I mean tailspin the pricks. And I'm sitting here like a big goof."

We start a long visual slide down diagonal lines of blue. "Something's happened to me. And I don't know why. I've gotta figure it out." The slide is smooth, across a tilted set of window blinds, light leaking in. "I know what I can do, what I'm capable of doing." The colors and shapes pulse. "Not good. Not good, Bruce, it's not good." The shapes thicken, the motion is downward, following a thickening rod of darkish shades, a long, vertical descent. "I've got to figure that out. It's not right that I should wind up in that kind of a rut because I'm not that stupid, see? I have mentality." Down and down, from tan to

blue, till the central core breaks up into complex little moving dots, which change into fish swimming through aqua. A fish moves forward, dully. "I'm an intelligent person!"

The fish disappear in a quick horizontal zip. Blurred little hands hold blurred green leaves. "I'm no rank dummy. I've had the world by the ass. Several times." A golden light fires the edges of underwater greenery in pulsing abstractions. We know we are in an enclosed space, and we are going nowhere. The gold of a military insignia glints briefly. While the man talks, we see vague forms of color and shape slowly metamorphose into the almost-identifiable, then fall back into a romanticized beauty, liquid and full of soft light. "What'd I do with it? Pissed it down the goddam drain." Out of the blurred environment runners race through rainbow colors. They slide out of sight, out of grasp.

"Why?," the voice demands to know. I imagine the man's eyes rheumy and bleared, full of his own wealth and confusion of experience, his own inner vision. The P-38 plane dangles now, hung puppet-like, twisting uselessly. Very wistfully, the voice continues, "I understand life. Bruce, I understand it but I can't live it. See?" The runners come back in the other direction, then a blobby head seems to be addressing us, and a body builder postures. "I had everything right in these hands, these crazy hands."

The same subtle coloring of "P-38"'s painterly opening, as the wet, silvery-beige of a window screen, fades in. The words to a song carry some of the clues to the pilot's predicament,

proclaiming, "There will be other songs to sing, another Fall, another Spring, but there will never be another you," as the focus changes to reveal a bird at a feeder outside the window. Bruce adds more written text, and ends with "Te lucis ante terminum." (thy Light before the end of the day –).

> Yes, I may dream a million dreams
> But how can they come true? -
> If there will never ever be
> Another you.

Bruce Baillie, according to his unique and irrepressible bent, has given us another gentle and penetrating meditation on a stage of life.

* * *

In reviewing Bruce's video, I can't separate it from the influence of our long talk on the phone. I can't separate it from the matter of my own life, or from the issue of how my generation is treating the matri-and patri-archs of his, or from the problems that visual artists in media are having in screening and broadcast opportunities, or from our discussion of Dante coming to the middle of his life (as Bruce once came to his and as I have come to mine), to a forest so dark that "even to think of it makes me afraid." I can't separate it from this thing of "life," which Bruce is so constantly immersed in, being cast aside in favor of some sort of approved scheduling and routine performance. Is it precisely because the forest of our present society is so dark that rules and regulations are more emphasized than the thing art is ultimately made of--consciousness itself? To me, all these things are in "The P-38 Pilot."

6

Bruce was late for the deadline of the film/video festival in Portland. "Oh, no," a sweet voice told me primly, when I pled Bruce's case. "The schedules are already made out." Hard to believe that these curators of film art have no idea who the artists are!

It's to Bruce's credit, rant and rave as he might over the phone, that his art is full of humor and ultimate defenselessness. He sets aside personal frustration for an angelic letting-go, the acceptance of a spiritual reality over a materialistic one.

In the end, Bruce's P-38 pilot doesn't blame the coming generation, or society, or any of the annoyances I have spoken of here. Essentially he takes the responsibility for his life on his own shoulders. "I'm a rank idiot," he contradicts his earlier words. "I fucked off my life." Bruce, too, tells me that he doesn't look for the pretty people anymore, that it doesn't matter anymore, that he takes whatever and whomever comes across his path.

The little bird returns in the Spring, to eat its fill from the feeder again. Maybe the next generation will have its P-38 pilots too, asking why they threw it all away.

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12.90
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deserted barrack-like building—photographed as in a conventional (well-made) documentary (less its commentary). The film then becomes increasingly manic—the images more awkward and darker, slowly increasing in contrast and losing their natural colour. The building is inhabited by young men, who show no apparent reason for living. They sit, grin, play cards, touch themselves, but never leave, never look out even. As the contrast increases, acidic colour filters are superimposed—detachment from reality indicated clinically through a formal device. ('Billabong' is Australian for a stream diverted into a stagnant pool; the barracks are, in fact, some kind of a reform school work camp.) To make its final point, the camera approaches an open window, and there, directly outside (in full colour again), is the Pacific Ocean.

Bruce Baillie worked briefly for Will Hindle at one time early in his career and shares something of Hindle's technical perfectionism. Baillie, founder of the Canyon Cinema Co-op, is one of the West Coast's most complete film-makers. He started to make films in the early sixties, making 'news' items 'for a specific local audience'—the audience in the Bay area who came to his Canyon screenings. At this time, his films were strictly narrative or documentary, edited only to restore sequence and continuity. *To Parsifal* (1963) was his first major work, a film poem to summer, structured on the Parsifal legend—huge seascapes, fishermen, railwaymen laying tracks through tall grassland, a clear life-supporting mountain stream, a vision of a girl. Baillie begins to edit with an epic sense, conveying a growing awareness of a larger meaning to the work being done—both to the labourers' work in the film and to his own film-making process. In *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964), a film about life extinction but hinting at escape, he acknowledges the potential in 'imperfect' imagery—over-exposed shots, 'awkward' camera movements and editing—for conveying direct emotive meaning (urgency, exhaustion, tension, etc.). His work continuously moves between the epic and the highly intuitive, as the subject dictates. *Quixote* (1965–6) is a feature-length work and Baillie's most committed and complex social statement. Essentially, it is a composition of open observations and often bitter reflections made on a journey across America, using dynamic superimpositions—shots of Vietcong warfare over shots of New York, for example—not for propagandist reasons, but because the combined image externalizes the practised hostility of that particular environment. *Quixote* was also the turning point in Baillie's film-making. Since then his main films have developed along a restrained, more formal course, though when the occasion demands, he is still committed to making documentaries—like *Newsreel* (1966).

Tung (1966), 'a poem to a friend named Tung', is an uninterrupted flow of superb colour images—a girl in negative (walking) floating on a field of moving colours—while a poem appears, almost as punctuation, across the bottom of the frame. *Castro Street* (1966; plates 50 and 51) is an essay in the structure of images. Baillie marries colour images of one side of an industrial street ('female') with black and white of the other ('male'), using black-gloved hands as a flexible matte in front of the lens while shooting—filling in the dark areas with other images later. The picture quality and colour control he has achieved in this film has no equal in the commercial cinema—it is of the same quality as the very best work of Markopoulos, Hindle or Emshwiller.

In *Still Life* (1966) and *All My Life* (1966), Baillie condenses, with an almost classical Japanese discipline, a complete statement into a single shot. *Still Life* shows a table top, flowers and a few objects on it, a room with windows at the far end out of focus behind it, from a static camera position. A woman crosses one way, then returns; men's voices are heard talking. It takes two minutes in all. *All My Life* is a single pan across a fence with roses, and up to the sky (crossed with a telegraph wire). Ella Fitzgerald sings the title song, *All my Life* ... These two films represent Baillie's most powerful affirmation of the purpose of cinematography. Baillie's most recent work is *Quick Billy* (1968–).

Ron Finne's *How Old Is the Water* (1968) could have been a version of Steiner's *H_2O*, but absolutely isn't. Finne's film does not attempt to manipulate surface reflections into abstractions; instead it reveals the dynamics of water movement (over a small waterfall) with almost a naturalist's insight. Finne's is a film of rushing and falling—the water tracing paths of light on the screen as in Anger's Vermeer-like *Eaux d'Artifice*. Finne draws attention to the empathy that exists between humans and natural rhythms by his brilliant choice of soundtrack—the hypnotic, repetitive sound of a Red Indian 'hand game' and chant.

Steve Dwoskin is perhaps the most traditional of all the film-maker craftsmen. A New Yorker now in London, Dwoskin's films contain no superimpositions, no impulsive camera movements, no abstract images of any sort. They are conventional documentaries—even to the extent in one case of having a narration on the soundtrack. They are experimental only in their uncompromising commitment to their subject matter—the study of human isolation and the gestures we make towards communication. In his most famous film, *Alone* (1966; plate 52), the camera watches from two or three chosen positions, as a girl, lying on a bed, communicates her loneliness through her body. (To say she masturbates—which is how the film is often described—is an overstatement; she just

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language with vision. One strategy he has used to control this problem has been to mediate his text with profuse allusions and quotation of poetry (as the place where language is most self-aware). In the letter to Yves Kovacs, he reinterprets the influence of Surrealism by bringing it into alignment with recent American poetics. The complementary question of the relationship of film to music dominates the letter to Ronna Page.

Bruce Baillie's major films occupy a region between the early lyrical films of Brakhage and the mythopoeic cinema that followed. *To Parsifal, Mass, Quixote,* even *Castro Street* and *Valentin de las Sierras,* are heroic poems without heroes. The characteristic strategy of Baillie is to find an image of exaltation or liberation—in the movement of a train, a flying spaceman, a motorcyclist, or a particularly sympathetic and usually aged face—which is at first valorized and emphasized by carefully selected music or an intricate mixture of natural and musical sounds. Yet the more sinister implications of these metaphoric vehicles are seldom far removed. In *Mass* and *Quixote* this tension within the imagery is polarized by an explicitly political structure and the ironic use of filmic quotations (from advertisements and commercial films) which specifically attribute a negative value to cinematic representation. *Castro Street* and *Valentin de las Sierras* lack the social context of the earlier films and rely more heavily on the ability of sensuous imagery to convey the antithetical structures of meaning. In fact, it is as they veer toward the apogee of this sensuousness that the contradictory movement is initiated: in *Castro Street* it is the slow movement of the train through a field of flowers that raises the polarity of natural and mechanical consciousness which is deceptively couched in the center of the film; while in *Valentin de las Sierras* the close loving attention to the wrinkled flesh of the ancient guitarist, whose song gives the film its title, reveals that he is blind. His blindness intensifies the pathos of his song and underlines the optical scrutiny of the wandering film-maker, who in this film presents himself as entering on horseback, but unseen, the village he records in a rich texture of close-up synecdoches. In his very attention to detail the film-maker seems to be avoiding any direct glance that would acknowledge his presence; in place of a self-image, he offers us the moving shadow of the horse which brings him to and away from his subject.

9

While Deren, Broughton, Peterson, Markopoulos, and Brakhage were mining their Surrealist, Dadaist, and Constructivist sources for a cinematic vocabulary with which to formulate crises of the self, another group of young American artists turned back to the geometrical abstraction of the Germans in the 1920s to revive the graphic cinema. Oskar Fischinger's presence in Hollywood during these years was a mediating influence. So was that of Len Lye in

QUICK BILLY

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'Quick Billy' Opens

The Whitney Museum program notes for "Quick Billy," a 75-minute experimental film by Bruce Baille, refer to "the essential experience of transformation, between Life and Death, death and birth, or rebirth." One viewer, who would cheerfully have settled for Bugs Bunny, found the first half fascinating, often beautiful. After that, hang on to your sideburns.

It's the early portion, obviously the work of an experimental master, that will hook you with its steady, rhythmical flow of color images, abstract and natural, and eerie sounds that indeed suggest the pulsation of life forces and energy. Furthermore, the first half seems better organized and controlled. The fragmentary, helter-skelter effect of the rest makes for thick and not especially interesting viewing. A self-consciously coy satire of an old-time Western, toward the end, is crude and unfunny.

HOWARD THOMPSON.

the village VOICE, *April* 1, 1971

movie JOURNAL

by Jonas Mekas

In my film-makers' Pantheon, Bruce Baillie takes a shining place. His work I can see again and again, it grows on me. "Quick Billy," which is running now at the Whitney Museum, is his latest work. It crowns 10 years of Baillie's lyrical and pastoral film sensibility.

Some have referred to Baillie as the most American of all the avant-garde film-makers. There is in Bruce Baillie something that reminds us of the wide country, of the spaces of America. If we remember Brakhage films for certain formal qualities of images, if we remember Markopoulos's films because of the uncompromising purity of his filmic language, so, myself at least, I remember Baillie for certain images, certain almost pretty images that keep reappearing in my mind. Curiously enough, those images have always to do with travel, with cross-country rides, with wide spaces, with the huge American continent being crossed, the hugeness, which Baillie so perfectly symbolized with the image of the turtle slowly moving across the desert, somewhere in Arizona or some other place, in "Quixote." I also remember the image of the grass violently shaking on the side of the railroad, from the power of the passing train, in "To Parsifal." There are always trains moving across the country in Bruce Baillie's films, in "Quixote," in "To Parsifal," in "Castro Street." There is the mystical motorcyclist riding in the "Mass." And Mr. Hayashi dies on the highway, run over by a car in "Mr. Hayashi." In "Quick Billy," at the end of the film, we see Bruce Baillie himself riding off into the unknown—the eternal rider, superimposed upon the map of the United States.

So he rides through the wide spaces of the country, through the wide spaces of his memories, dreams, childhood, friendships, and we who correspond sometimes with him, we do not even always know where he is. He seems to be always on the road. But in the images of his films, he seems to be very stable and very sure and always going after some definite and, probably, always the same image. With each film one feels he maybe found it. But no, the image, the dream is not yet caught, still somewhere else—so he makes another film, trying to come closer to it, from some other angle. In "Quick Billy" he may have caught it through the form of the film. The form of the film itself may have something to do with the eternal search of Baillie, the feeling of all the lost travelers of the world, of attaching oneself and going again, attaching oneself and letting go again (it is no accident that Baillie says "Quick Billy" has been structured upon the Bardo Thodol, The Book of the Dead—the greatest book of the greatest travel ever)—and when it's all over, he sort of opens the very end of the film and permits it very slightly, very casually to spill out into the open again, he never closes the form completely. Paradoxically, this way he may have achieved the most complete and most satisfactory film, which, through this mysterious openness, permits us to project into it so many incomplete parts of ourselves.

There are fewer "pretty" images in this film, fewer individual memorable images, you see most of the time only brief and casual glimpses, all done in the most fluid lyrical-pastoral film language that I know. It's with mastery and grace that Baillie transcended the Brakhagean aesthetics and asserted clearly and gloriously his own creative individuality, presenting us with his own unique vision of the world. I do not expect that suddenly wide masses of people will rush to the Whitney to see "Quick Billy." I am realistic enough to know that the majority of the film-going public are still milling in the hallways of Eternal Hollywood. The art of Bruce Baillie is for the lucky, or for the ready, few.